

Developing and Retaining Agricultural Education Teachers in California

A Dissertation

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by

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Abstract

Developing and Retaining Agricultural Education Teachers in California

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The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of agricultural education teachers at the high school level, seeking to understand agricultural education teachers' choice of profession, the events and activities that contribute to self-efficacy as well as longevity in the profession. A lack of sufficient qualified agricultural education teachers has been recognized at the national level as well as the state level in California.

The following research questions guide this study: 1) What experiences led current agricultural education teachers to choose the profession? 2) What experiences during a teacher's tenure in agricultural education affect self-efficacy? 3) What experiences contribute to greater longevity in the agricultural education profession? The three guiding questions were explored through in-depth semi-structured interview, observations, and artifacts.

Four major themes emerged from a triangulation of the data from semi-structured interviews, observations, and artifacts and are presented as findings: (a) passion was expressed through an on-going commitment; (b) priorities are the basis for longevity; (c) relationships contribute to efficacy, effectiveness, and longevity; and (d) building capacity in students strengthens ongoing relationships.

Classroom teaching alone does not seem to entice or contribute to longevity of agricultural education teachers. Agricultural education programs reach far beyond the classroom including leadership development through the FFA, experiential learning with SAE projects, and working with the community members and leaders. Four recommendations for attracting, developing, and contributing to self-efficacy and longevity in agricultural education profession were identified through the trail of evidence presented in the findings and conclusions: (a) actively encourage students to become agriculture educators, (b) establish staged professional development, (c) create mentor programs that support the development of life balance skills, and (d) establish a state-wide effort to gather information on program impact.

Key terms: agricultural education teaching, longevity, self-efficacy, retention, retaining teachers, and capacity building in students.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all of those who choose agricultural education as a profession, those individuals who continue to make a positive difference in the lives of students in their agricultural education programs across the state of California. And to my colleague Cary Trexler and all the agricultural student teachers from University of California, Davis who have become much better at teaching and engaging students than I ever was!

Andi	Adams	Wendy	Evans	Tara	Meade	<i>George</i>	<i>Sellu</i>
Jake	Bates	Miranda	Forse	Luz	Mendoza	Erin	Simons
Dani	Battisti	Dan	Frank	Maya	O'Connor	Naomi	Spitze-Lavelle
Christie	Bennett	Krista	Frelinger--Tarvares	Jenni	Pareas	<i>Alyssa</i>	<i>Stalley</i>
<i>Holly</i>	<i>Buscombe-Whitworth</i>	<i>Javier</i>	<i>Gutierrez</i>	Mary	Park	<i>Julie</i>	<i>Stewart-Brashears</i>
Jen	Caputo-Crarer	Meredith	Hensleigh-Sievers	Garrett	Pedretti	Crystal	Thessin-Grooms
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Becky	Deniz-Chavalier	Rachel	Imbach	Yong	Ra	Miguel	Vazquez-Felix
Becky	Domengoni	<i>Matt</i>	<i>Kempen</i>	Kayla	Roberts	Sarah	Warren
Travis	Edwards	Amanda	Larson	Matt	Rooney	Donnie	Whitworth
Grant	Ermis	Lillian	Martinez-Xanthus	<i>Bekah</i>	<i>Rottenberg</i>	Britney	Whyler
Judy	Etcheverria-Aschwandan	Michael	McIntosh	David	Salzer	Becky	Wiedmann-Strode
<i>Kaytie</i>	<i>Ettlin</i>	Jesse	Meade	Megan	Sebesta	Alex	Xanthus

In 2014 bolded names are teaching agricultural education

In 2014 italicized names are still in education (teaching another subject or administration)

Lastly, to all the students and student teachers I worked with while teaching agricultural education at Lemoore High School and my teaching partners Marybeth Hearn, Ron King, Howard Clarke (and Cary Clarke), Mike Voorhes, and Bud Gorns.

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Thank you to the 11 agricultural teachers from across the state that allowed me to interview them. They gave sincere and honest answers to the questions and insight into their experiences that lead them to the profession of agricultural education, as well as their experiences leading to their longevity.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research

This study explored why individuals chose to teach high school agricultural education and what contributed to self-efficacy and longevity in the profession. A phenomenological approach was used to identify the events and activities that contributed to their professional choice, self-efficacy, and tenure in agricultural education. The goal of this study was to inform agricultural leadership (California Department of Education Adult Leadership Division, Agricultural Education Teacher Supervisors, elected officers of the California Agricultural Teachers Association, and agricultural teachers) of the professional development needs of mid- to late-career agricultural teachers in California.

Introduction to the Problem

In 2009, there was a national shortage of 390 qualified agricultural education teachers (Kantrovich, 2010). According to McCabe (2012), California experienced a shortage of 28 agricultural education teachers that same year and has experienced a similar shortfall since 2000. From 2004 through 2008 and again in 2011, the shortfall of qualified agricultural education teachers was greater than 50% of the open positions, leaving as many as 50 Agricultural education secondary teaching positions unfilled each of those years (McCabe, 2012).

In California, there are only 14 public universities authorized to credential Career and Technical Education (CTE) teachers. Of the 14 universities, only ten currently have students enrolled in specific CTE areas, and five of the 10 are credentialing agricultural education teacher candidates. The universities that offer agricultural education credentials are: California State, Chico; California State Fresno; California Polytechnic

State University, San Luis Obispo; California State Polytechnic University, Pomona; and University of California, Davis (UCD). A highly qualified agricultural education teacher is defined by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) as meeting the following requirements: (a) having agricultural related work experience of 2000 hours or greater post-high school, (b) holding a valid Single Subject Agricultural Credential (SSAC), and (c) holding a valid Agricultural Specialist Credential (ASC).

The SSAC authorizes the candidate to teach in the seven agricultural content areas: agriculture business, agricultural mechanics, agricultural science, animal science, environmental science, ornamental horticulture, and plant science. The ASC authorizes the candidate to manage an agricultural program, advise the student leadership organization Future Farmers of America (FFA) and supervise agriculture experience projects (SAE), and manage an agricultural department. Without an ASC certified educator, an agricultural education program is not eligible for State monies to support their programs through completing a grant from the California Department of Education (CDE). This grant, Agricultural Incentive Grant (AIG), is specific to agricultural programs and is given annually to support activities beyond the classroom.

In 2009, the five universities credentialed 54 highly qualified agricultural education teachers for 71 open agricultural education positions in California (California Department of Education [CDE], 2012). California is not unique in the annual shortfall for agricultural education teachers; several other states also experienced shortages of agricultural education teachers, which triggered the National Council for Agricultural Education (NCAE) in February 2013 to sponsor a “Recruitment and Retention Summit” in Indianapolis, Indiana.

In 2012, there were 316 public and private high school agricultural education programs and just under 700 agricultural education teachers serving over 70,000 high school students in California. Agricultural Education throughout the United State utilizes, integral model to teach using three modalities as presented in Figure 1: cognitive (classroom learning), affective (leadership development), and experiential (supervised experiences).

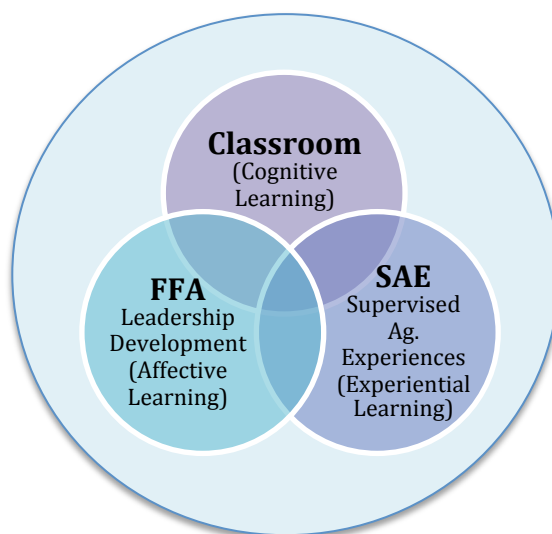


Figure 1. Agricultural Education Program

Once credentialed and hired, the effective ability to juggle these complex requirements in an agricultural education program may be the key to the agricultural education teacher's success and retention. Unlike other teachers, in subject matter areas who may only be evaluated annually by an administrator, administrators and CDE regional supervisors regularly evaluate agricultural education teachers. An administrator evaluates an agricultural education teacher on classroom effectiveness, a regional supervisor evaluates the success and participation of the students in the FFA and quality

of SAE's, and peers evaluate their personal participation in the professional organization (CATA). Chambers and Hardy (2005) suggested, "teachers self-efficacy refers to a specific self-referent belief in a teacher's ability to organize and execute the actions necessary to reach certain attainments" (p. 3). Self-efficacy in agricultural education teaching is affected by the many different rewards and challenges of being a teacher: classroom management, administration, parents, educational reform, and financial support for their programs.

According to Norton (1999), a "satisfied teacher is far more likely to find personal self-fulfillment" in teaching than one who is not satisfied with "working conditions, administrative leadership and support, school climate, teacher autonomy, student behavior and parental support" (p. 53). When a teacher is dissatisfied with one or more of the above-mentioned conditions, there is a greater chance for teacher turnover. According to Boe, Cook, and Sunderland (2008), there are three types of teacher turnover: (a) attrition, (b) teacher area transfer, and (c) migration. Voluntary attrition is when teachers leave the classroom for any reason, including going to other educational positions, such as counseling, administration, or district office positions. Within the first five years, one-third of teachers leave due to attrition (Carroll & Foster, 2010).

This chapter begins with the problem statement to be researched, followed by the purpose of the study and significance of the problem. Next, the conceptual framework for the study and the researcher's philosophical stances are discussed, followed by a literature review. Subsequently, the researcher provides definitions for key terms, followed by a description of the researcher's assumptions and the study's limitations. Finally, a brief summary concludes the chapter.

Statement of the Problem to be Researched

In California, there is a need to educate and retain more highly qualified agricultural education teachers in secondary education to fill open positions across California in agricultural programs.

Purpose and Significance of the Problem

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of agricultural education teachers at the high school level, seeking to understand agricultural education teachers' choice of profession, the events and activities that contribute to self-efficacy as well as longevity in the profession. A lack of sufficient qualified agricultural education teachers has been recognized at the national level as well as the state level.

At the national level, the NCAE sponsored a "Recruitment and Retention Summit" in February 2013. This was not the first time teacher recruitment and retention were identified as a critical need at the national level. In 2003, the National Association of Agricultural Education and National FFA initiated a National "Teach Ag" campaign with the goal of increasing the number of highly qualified teachers. California launched a similar effort with its "Teach Ag" campaign in 2004. In California, the campaign focused more on the recruitment of agricultural education teachers, not their retention.

The California Agricultural Teachers' Association (CATA) has successfully focused on keeping beginning teachers in the classroom, providing professional development in areas of high need for first-, second-, and third-year teachers. This is evidenced by the successful retention of Agricultural education teacher through the fifth year (CDE, 2012). After the third year of teaching, however, CATA provides only

limited opportunities for professional development. Professional development activities sponsored by the CATA for post-third-year agricultural education teachers target specific content or program areas in agricultural education. Therefore, it is important for the Teacher Preparation Programs (TPP) to prepare agricultural education teaching candidates for their profession and help them identify resources that are helpful throughout their careers. TPP are designed to be the foundation for effective teaching with the culminating event of the student teaching practicum.

There is criticism of TPP, suggesting that there are out-of-touch university supervisors, lack of preparation for cooperating teachers, as well as lack of field experience for teacher candidates leading to diminished returns (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007). This criticism extends to all subject areas of TPP. Levine (2011), discussing delivery of teacher preparation, suggested, “too many professors lack recent teaching experience and have insufficient contact with schools” (p. 2). The professors are teaching theories and procedures that may be unrealistic for classroom implementation.

TPP traditionally seek to provide vast amounts of information to student teachers, rather than taking a singular focus on building a strong foundation for the student teacher during his or her practicum. Lidstone and Ammon (2002) and Feiman-Nemser (2008) found that student teachers begin TPP with preconceived beliefs about teaching and expectations about the practicum. Feiman-Nemser (2008) suggested these beliefs and expectations might hinder the actual development of the student teacher. Furthermore, Feiman-Nemser (2008) asserted that the beliefs and expectations developed during the

student teaching practicum will be the foundation for the beliefs and expectations throughout the teacher's career.

Arnie Duncan, Secretary of Education under President Obama, suggested, "our teacher-preparation programs have operated largely in the dark without access to meaningful data that tells them how effective their graduates are in the classroom" (as cited in Eaton, 2011, para. 3). Supporting Duncan's statement, Eaton's (2011) research found that, "62 percent of the new teachers surveyed said they were unprepared to begin teaching after graduating from those [teacher education] programs" (p. 1).

If general teacher credentialing programs are not adequately preparing new teachers for teaching, are agricultural education credentialing programs preparing teachers to become proficient in the classroom and in the four components beyond the classroom: (a) providing leadership opportunities and advising FFA, (b) supervising SAE, (c) managing an agricultural education program, and (d) participation in professional development for agricultural education teachers? Just as there is limited development, there is also limited research beyond the first three years of teaching about the competency and self-efficacy of teachers and their abilities in these areas.

According to Whittington, McConnell, and Knobloch (2006), in the first three years of teaching, "two factors that have a significant impact on teacher efficacy are the number of class preparations the teacher is responsible for and the perceived excellence of the student teaching experience" (p. 36). In addition, beginning agricultural education teachers struggle with the stresses and frustration that accompany a new profession, ultimately adversely affecting their self-efficacy (Knobloch & Whittington, 2002). Walker, Garton, and Kitchel (2004) identified factors that have a positive effect on

agricultural education teachers “achievement, advancement, recognition, responsibility and the work itself” (p. 29) and influence self-efficacy of teachers and desire to remain in education (Cochran-Smith et al., 2011). Based on previous research related to teacher longevity, the researcher endeavored to discover the perceived self-efficacy and experiences of agricultural education teachers that shape their decision to both enter and remain in the profession.

Research Questions Focused on Solution Finding

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What experiences led current agricultural education teachers to choose the profession?
2. What experiences during a teacher’s tenure in agricultural education affect self-efficacy?
3. What experiences contribute to greater longevity in the agricultural education profession?

To fully address the research questions, this research drew upon a phenomenological design to understand the “lived experiences” (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994) of the teachers’ choices of teaching agricultural education as their profession, their perceived level of self-efficacy, and their reasons for staying in the agricultural education profession.

Conceptual Framework

Researcher’s Stance

The researcher has an epistemological philosophical stance and social constructivist framework as an agricultural education teacher supervisor. Epistemologists

“collaborate and spend time in the field with participants” (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 17). Rather than distancing from those being researched, an epistemological stance allows the researcher to manifest “closeness to those being researched by spending time in the field, collaboration and the impact that being researched has on the researcher” (Creswell, 2008, p. 247).

As a social constructivist, the researcher explored the connection of events and episodes that agricultural education preservice and credentialed teachers experienced, seeking to understand its impact on their tenure from dialogue within this community of practice. According to Gergen (1985), “social constructionist inquiry is principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain or otherwise account for the world in which they live” (p. 266); and “what we take to be real and true is not found in nature but rather created in the course of participating within a particular community of practice” (Gergen, Lightfoot, & Sydow, 2004, p. 390).

At the time of this study, the researcher was employed as a lecturer and teacher - supervisor for agricultural education and science student teachers at the University of California, Davis. She had been employed in this capacity for over nine years, and supervised 44 agricultural education student teachers over this time period; 28 continue to teach agricultural education. Of those who no longer teach, some are now educational administrators or counselors, while others are working in the agriculture industry. Prior to being at the university, the researcher was an agricultural education teacher for 16 years, advised an FFA chapter, and coached state champion career development teams in agricultural sales and service: citrus (three championships), cotton (nine championships), dairy cattle, dairy products, and marketing plan. She also ensured that her students

received recognition at the state and national conventions in proficiency areas and FFA degree completion. Her students had the opportunity to develop leadership skills by participating in conferences, conventions, and field days throughout the state and nationally. In addition, she supervised projects in: (a) market and breeding poultry, rabbits, goats, sheep, swine, and cattle (both dairy and beef); (b) crops, including broccoli, cotton, wheat, and alfalfa; and (c) student work experience projects on farms, feed stores, and research labs. The researcher has also been a member of the CATA and NAAE for the past 26 years.

Because of this background, the researcher may have preconceived notions about how agricultural education teachers develop strong self-efficacy that will need to be carefully identified. As the researcher had longstanding relationships with some of the participants in this study, it was important to listen and “bracket” her mental models while interviewing. It was crucial to “bracket” the experiences as an agricultural education teacher and university supervisor to assure data were properly represented (Creswell, 2007, p. 59).

Conceptual Framework of the Research Streams

As presented in Figure 2, the three streams of literature essential to providing a foundation for exploring longevity in Agricultural education teaching include: (a) teacher preparation programs (TPP), (b) developing self-efficacy in teaching, and (c) retention in teaching.

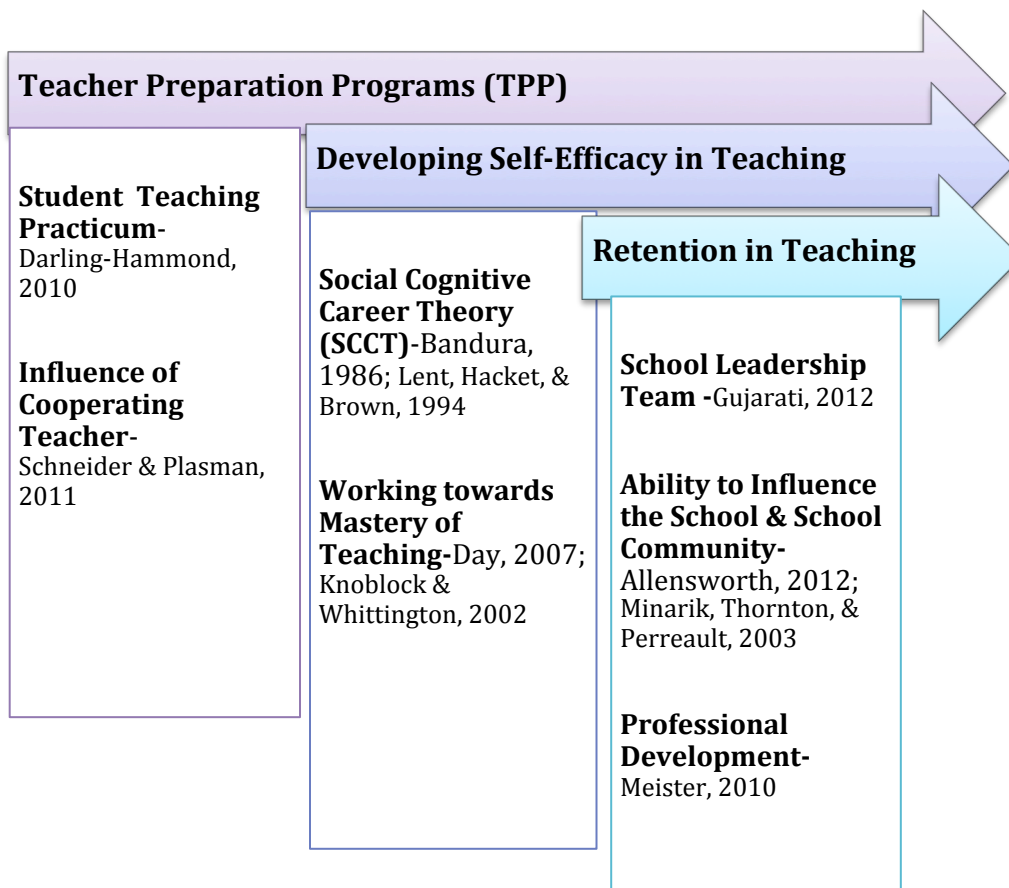


Figure 2. Conceptual framework.

The stream on TPP reviews research related to the capstone event in TPP, the student teaching practicum, and examines how this event has an extended impact on the individual's self-efficacy as a teacher. The research offers insights into the importance of aligning TPP course work with the student teaching practicum (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Eaton, 2011). It offers recommendations and conclusions related to the role of the university supervisor suggesting that the university supervisor support both the cooperating teacher and student teacher during their student teaching practicum

(Anderson, 2007; He & Cooper, 2011; Norman, 2011). Student teacher mentoring by the cooperating teacher is indicated as an expectation by both the university supervisor and the student teacher (Anderson, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Research findings suggest it is during the student teaching practicum that the student teacher truly learns strategies and pedagogies that they will continue to develop well after they are employed as teachers. There is an abundance of research on the pre-service teacher, but not nearly as much on the preservice agricultural education teacher and even less on the self-efficacy of agricultural education teachers after they complete their student teaching practicum and begin teaching.

Teacher self-efficacy begins with their “undergraduate subject matter knowledge” prior to entering a TPP (Newton, Jang, Nunes, & Stone, 2010). Gilman, Peake, and Parr (2012) suggested high job satisfaction relates to longevity in the agricultural education profession, but there is more to teaching agricultural education than understanding the subject matter content. The other areas that contribute to an agricultural teacher’s self-efficacy include: coaching and supervising FFA activities, supervising agricultural projects, overseeing the agricultural department program, and professional development activities with the CATA. According to Day (2007), self-efficacy in teaching is developed at the end of “professional life phases” (PLP) one, years four through eight.

The three “professional life phases” (PLP) in teaching are, identified by Day (2007, 2012) (a) PLP 1- developing a commitment to teaching (years 0-3) and developing identity and efficacy in the classroom (years 4-7), (b) PLP 2- tensions and transitions in teaching (years 8-15) and challenges to commitment (years 16-23), and (c) PLP 3- sustaining motivation (years 24-30) and ability to cope with change, looking to retire

(years 31 plus). An understanding of the constructs and interests leading people to choose agricultural education could ultimately help recruit and retain teachers. Lent and Brown (1996) noted that Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCCT) represents the interplay "between many constructs, interest abilities and goals" (p. 311).

"All generations tend to see teaching conditions as far more important than salary, all other factors being equal" (Coggshall, Ott, Behrstock, & Lasagna, 2010, p. 7).

Teaching conditions may include school leadership, the ability to influence the school and engage the community, and relevant professional development (Allensworth, 2012; Gardner, 2010). Teachers tend to remain in teaching when they "develop collaborative relationships among school leaders and families" (Allensworth, 2012, p. 3). Retention of all teachers is not the goal, but retention of teachers that have the characteristics of effectiveness is (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006). Maintaining effectiveness related to teaching professional development may help "bridge the gap between theory and practice" in the classroom, in the school, and in the community (Margolin, 2011, p. 7).

Definition of Terms

Agriculture Education (Agricultural education)

Instruction based on agricultural topics (Newcomb, McCracken, Warmbrod, & Whittington, 1993).

California Agricultural Teachers' Association (CATA)

The purpose of the professional organization California Agricultural Teachers' Association is "to promote and improve the teaching of agriculture in California and to foster the welfare of those engaged in agricultural education in the work" (California Agricultural Teachers' Association [CATA], 2013, para. 1).

Capacity Building

“Concerns competencies, resources and motivation. Individuals and groups are high in capacity if they possess and continue to develop knowledge and skills, if they attract and use resources wisely and if they are putting the energy to get important things done collectively and continually” (Fullen, 2008, p. 57).

Career and Technical Education (CTE)

Formally known as vocational education, CTE prepares students for career and college readiness; it is based on sequencing of classes (Perkins, 2005).

FFA

Formally known as the Future Farmers of America, FFA is a federally chartered corporation under section 70901 of Public Law 105-225, making the leadership training and participation in FFA activities an integral component of Agricultural Education (National FFA Organization, 2013).

Effective Teachers

Teachers with strong cognitive skills in management and instructional techniques as well as personal characteristics are considered effective teachers (Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, & James, 2002).

Field experience/Pre-service /Student teaching practicum

Experience during the credentialing process under the supervision of a cooperating teacher and university supervisor in a school setting that is planned to develop teaching qualities prior to being credentialed. Caprano, Caprano, and Helfeldt (2010) defined student teaching “as a variety of early and systematic P-

12 classroom-based opportunities in which teacher candidates may observe, assist, tutor, instruct, and/or conduct research” (p. 131).

Highly Qualified

To be deemed highly qualified, teachers must have: (a) a bachelor’s degree, (b) full state certification or licensure, and (c) proof that they know the subject they teach (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

Marginal Subjects

Career and Technical Education is characterized by teaching a set of skills; therefore, they typically struggle to gain acceptance within the traditional academic curricula (Shoulders & Myers, 2011).

Probationary teacher

California K-12 teachers earn permanent status, not tenure. It takes two years being a probationary teacher working with an appropriate credential in a regular educational school program to acquire permanent status (Education Code §44929.21) (Ernest Tuttle Law, n.d.).

Self-Efficacy

“beliefs that refer to people’s judgment of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances” (Bandura, 1986, p. 391).

Social Cognitive Career Theory

“Focuses on the ‘argentic’ variables of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals and how they interact with a persons environment (gender, race/ethnicity,

social supports and barriers) in the context of people's career development" (Lent et al., 1999, p. 297).

Student engagement

"Refers to the ability to persuade students to want to learn" (Roberts, Harlin, & Rickets, 2006, p. 82).

Supervised Agricultural Education (SAE) projects

SAE projects relate to agriculture, are completed by students outside of classroom time, and are supervised by the agriculture teacher. The project may be in areas of entrepreneurship, placement, research and experimentation, or exploratory of careers (National FFA Organization, 2013).

Teacher attrition

Teachers who choose to leave the profession (Lloyd & Sullivan, 2012). Attrition costs the school system \$12,546/teacher (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

Teacher effectiveness

Measured ability, credentials, experience, and subject-matter preparation (Guarino et al., 2006, p. 4).

Assumptions and Limitations

Having served in California Agricultural Education for over for over 26 years, the researcher holds several assumptions.

1. Agricultural education teachers *must* give high school students opportunities beyond the classroom day to fully develop their interest, skills, and knowledge.
2. Opportunities beyond the classroom give agricultural education teachers the greatest satisfaction and offer the strongest sense of self-efficacy.

3. The longer a person teaches agricultural education, the better he or she becomes at prioritizing the responsibilities of the agricultural education profession.

Possible limitations of the study may, include the small sampling of agricultural education teachers. With all interviews conducted in California, results may not necessarily be applicable to other regions of the country because of California's student diversity and size of agricultural education programs. Another possible limitation was the researcher is one of only 12 agricultural education teacher supervisors in California. Cooperating teachers may have limited or exaggerated their descriptions about their experiences because the researcher is well known throughout the state. Efforts were made to interview CATA members who were not former students or cooperating teachers.

Summary

Nationally, there is a shortage of teachers in certain subjects and a low retention rate in the profession. In California, there has been an annual shortage of "highly qualified" agricultural education teachers for over 10 years. A majority of the agricultural education teachers in California received preparation from one of the five agricultural TPP. During their credentialing process and TPP, student teachers learn about the components of an agricultural education program including: (a) becoming effective in the classroom, (b) advising the FFA, (c) supervising SAE projects, (d) agricultural education department management, and (e) participation in professional organizations, such as CATA. Recruitment and retention of agricultural education teachers with fewer than five years of experience has been the focus at the national level. Important questions remain regarding how to provide support that will help retain

agricultural education teachers entering the profession and those with greater than five years of teaching experience.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter presents the foundation for conducting research to explore the lived experiences leading teachers to choose the profession of teaching agricultural education and lived experiences that contributed to self-efficacy and longevity. Identifying the experiences that helped sway the decision to teach agricultural education, the areas of perceived self-efficacy, and reasons for longevity might inform professional development needs. This chapter reviews the theory, research, and practice in three areas (a) teacher preparation programs including agricultural education preparation and expectations, (b) teacher self-efficacy, and (c) retention in teaching (see Figure 3).

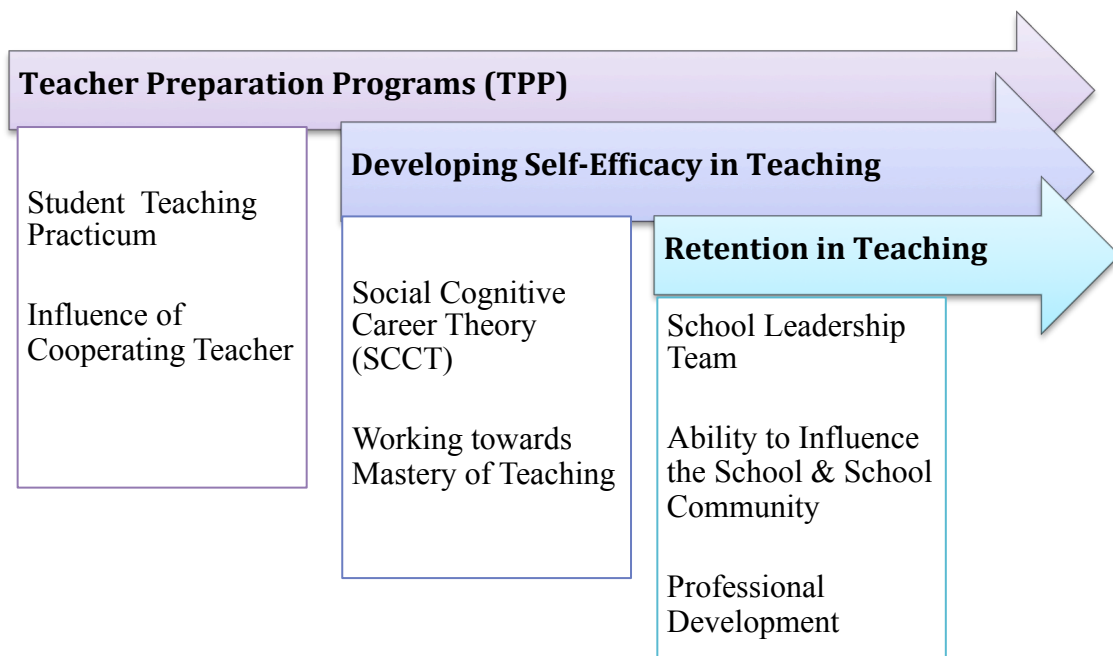


Figure 3. Theory and practice of research

Literature Review

Teacher Preparation Programs (TPP)

It is through the TPP that future teachers develop beliefs and values about teaching as well as techniques that will be used throughout their career. Although there are a series of theoretical courses that must be completed, the culminating, experiential event is the student teaching practicum (Darling-Hammond, 2007). It is during the student teaching practicum that the student teacher begins to develop into an authentic teacher. The student teacher relies on the cooperating teacher to learn acceptable professional beliefs and practices, reinforced by their university supervisor.

Student teaching practicum. The capstone event for most TPPs is the student teaching practicum, the practical application of the theories and knowledge gained during the TPP (Darling-Hammond, 2007). The experiences during the student teaching practicum vary from student teacher to student teacher and from school site to school site, and depend on the expectations of the student teacher, the experience of the cooperating teacher, the guidance from the university supervisor, and the requirements of the State. The student teaching practicum is inconsistent across California credential programs; the length and expectations differ from program to program. Programs may differ in student teaching practicum length from 10 to 36 weeks at a school site, hours in the classroom doing preparation and teaching, expectations for clerical activities, and participation in the professional activities and requirements of the State for credentialing highly qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007). These differences may affect a potential teacher's self-efficacy and need for continuing professional development.

Roberts et al. (2006) suggested student teachers enter the student teaching practicum “with a certain level of teaching efficacy (beliefs), based on their previous coursework, observations, and previous teaching experiences” (p. 83). To help student teachers move from the role of a student to that of a teacher (He & Cooper, 2011) during the student teaching practicum, student teachers should have opportunities to: (a) reflect about their teaching, (b) engage diverse students and families, (c) participate in professional learning communities to prepare them for their first year of teaching, and (d) reflect on their preparation as it relates to teacher effectiveness and responsibilities of becoming a professional. During the student teaching practicum, observing best practices of teaching facilitated by cooperating teachers helps the student teacher develop theories and practices that are wide-ranging. He and Cooper (2011) concluded, “student teachers must synthesize everything they have learned about collecting and developing instructional materials, teaching a lesson, guiding small group activities, establishing and maintaining classroom order, and interacting with faculty and parents” (p. 1) to evolve from an attentive student to an effective teacher. However, critiques offered by Feiman-Nemser (2001) and Crowe (2011) argued that teacher education programs do not prepare student teachers to engage students in learning or to reflect about how students learn. Both studies note that induction programs for beginning teachers evidence this.

The placement of the student teacher in a supportive and educative environment is an extremely important decision. According to Fazio and Volante (2011), the selection of the cooperating teacher may be the single most important responsibility for the university supervisor. Glenn (2006) agreed, suggesting a compatible match between student teacher and cooperating teacher is crucial to fostering a strong relationship and

allowing for collaboration and support to occur during the student teaching. During the practicum, the cooperating teacher has the largest impact on the student teacher's development, thus emphasizing the need for a good fit and healthy relationship between student teacher and cooperating teacher (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; Glenn, 2006; Norman, 2011).

Influences of cooperating teachers. The cooperating teacher serves as a mentor for the student teacher for daily routines, effective teaching methods, and classroom management strategies (Glenn, 2006). According to Pellegrino (2010), the TPP are not teaching effective classroom management strategies at a high enough caliber to be useful in the actual classroom. For this reason, the student teacher becomes dependent on the cooperating teacher to learn effective classroom management strategies and receive the guidance lacking in the university coursework. The teaching habits of the cooperating teacher, along with classroom management, daily routines are observed and learned during the student teaching practicum and carried on throughout the student teacher's future career, thus emphasizing the importance of a strong cooperating teacher to help develop effective new teachers (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; Glenn, 2006; Schneider & Plasman, 2011).

One of the integral responsibilities of the cooperating teacher is to demonstrate strategies, give direction on sequencing the curriculum, and give feedback on progress to the student teacher. Cooperating teachers give feedback to the student teacher in several ways. According to Stillwell (2009), feedback given by the mentor (cooperating teacher) should be evidential and behaviorally based on actions or inactions in the classroom, not descriptive or personality based. Stillwell's (2009) research indicates that evidential and

behavioral feedback help the student teacher reflect and develop professionally as a teacher without conflict. Furthermore, Stillwell (2009) suggested that videotaping is effective for allowing the student teacher and cooperating teacher to actually “see the same” thing. The cooperating teacher’s feedback plays an important role in the development of the student teacher’s self-efficacy.

The student teacher will emulate the cooperating teacher and frequently may adopt the beliefs of the cooperating teachers (Anderson, 2007; Osunde, 1996). This suggests that the cooperating teacher needs to be a highly qualified teacher who models effective pedagogy and positive relationships with students, parents, and administration. Tolbert (2011) further suggested that student teachers must effectively collaborate with colleagues and implement technology and media in addition to possessing excellent classroom management.

The cooperating teacher has an impact on all aspects of the practicum, including classroom procedures and management, as well as beliefs about students (Glenn, 2006; Pellegrino, 2010). Wise (2007) suggested a teacher’s self-efficacy contributes to the longevity in the profession, while the perception of subject matter taught may affect the self-efficacy of teachers (Shoulders & Myers, 2011).

Developing Self-Efficacy in Teaching

Several factors contribute to the self-efficacy of teachers beginning with the understanding of the content they are teaching. There are six content areas with which an agricultural education teacher must become familiar: (a) agricultural business, (b) agricultural mechanics, (c) animal science, (d) environmental sciences and natural resources, (e) ornamental horticulture, and (f) plant science. In addition, agricultural

education teachers are expected to fully understand: (a) advising the FFA, (b) SAE projects, and (c) managing an agricultural program. Unlike many other teachers, agricultural education teachers use contextual learning to teach academics, problem-based reasoning, and higher-order thinking skills.

According to Phipps and Osborn (1988):

AgEd programs should be part of the school's: (a) career exploration program; (b) education for citizenship; (c) consumer education program; (d) special education program, (e) applied science program, (f) practical arts program; (g) planning to enter a college or university program, and (h) vocational education. (p. 5)

Agricultural education teachers are preparing students for college and career readiness through exposing the students to a variety of contextual, experiential activities both in the classroom and beyond. The achievements of their students are celebrated annually at a member-parent banquet. Many times at this same event, agricultural education teachers are recognized for their commitment to their students. Recognition of effectiveness may also contribute to one's self-efficacy in his or her career. According to Bandura (1977), "successes raise mastery expectation; repeated failures lowers them, particularly if the mishaps occur early in the course of events" (p. 195) or teaching career.

Social cognitive career theory (SCCT). Social cognitive career theory developed by Bandura (1986) and modified by Lent et al. (1994) has three interlocking components that Ochs and Roessler (2004) identified as: (a) task performance, (b) interest, and (c) choice. According to Lent and Brown (1996), the SCCT "focuses on the processes through which (a) academic and career interest develop, (b) interests, in concert with other variables, promote career-relevant choices and (c) people attain varying levels of performance and persistence in their educational and career pursuits" (p. 311). SCCT

suggested the interplay between “many constructs; interests abilities, and goals” (Lent & Brown, 1996, p. 311) contribute to self-efficacy. Lent and Brown (1996) further break down the variables of “SCCT linking self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals” (p. 312). They conclude that perceived personal accomplishments have the greatest effect on self-efficacy beliefs, while successful experiences tend to raise self-efficacy and negative events tend to lower self-efficacy. Outcome expectations are shaped according to an individual’s perceived personal capabilities and their beliefs about the likely effects of various actions (Lent & Brown, 1996). Lastly, “personal goals help to guide, organize, and sustain a person’s own efforts without external reinforcement” (Lent & Brown, 1996, p. 312). Ultimately, SCCT is a good predictor of career-related performance based on two areas: (a) level of attainment individuals achieve in their work task and (b) the degree to which they persist, despite obstacles, at a particular work activity or career path (Lent & Brown, 1996). Teachers with high performance levels determined by self-perception and the degree to which they continue to improve the craft of teaching are then working toward mastery of teaching.

Mastery of teaching. People choose to teach for many reasons, but individuals that have always wanted to become a teacher or choose teaching because of intrinsic motivations to serve others are “more likely to exhibit higher self-efficacy in their teaching” (Knoblock & Whittington, 2002, p. 90). “Teaching efficacy is not a static phenomenon, but a dynamic measure affected by the student teaching experience, which is affected by teaching efficacy” (Roberts et al., 2010, p. 83). According to Day (2007) it is not until the end of the first “Professional Life Phase” (PLP 1) (see Table 1) teachers begin to experience efficacy in the classroom.

Table 1

Professional Life Phases (PLPs)

PLP	Years of Experience	Description
1	0-3	Commitment: Support and Challenge
1	4-7	Identify and Efficacy in Classroom
2	8-15	Managing Changes in Role and Identity: Growing Tensions and Transitions
2	16-23	Work-life Tensions: Challenges to Motivation and Commitment
3	24-30	Challenge to Sustaining Motivation
3	31+	Sustaining/Declining Motivation, Ability to Cope with Change, Looking to Retire

Source: Day (2007, p. 70)

Self-efficacy values may be inflated after the initial student teaching practicum because of over-confidence in their own teaching ability without the recognition of the value of the cooperating teacher's assistance (Blackburn & Robinson, 2008). A teacher in the profession for two to three years may have lower self-efficacy than one in the profession with five to six years of experience because of the new teacher learning curve. A beginning teacher learns how to handle the various challenges of teaching, either during student teaching or during the first years of teaching, which will ultimately affect a teacher's self-efficacy either positively or negatively (Blackburn & Robinson, 2008; Day, 2007).

Self-efficacy is the "beliefs influence teachers' persistence when things do not go smoothly and their resilience in the face of setbacks" (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001, p. 783). Several factors play into the teacher's own judgment of student

engagement and learning including student success, part of school community, influence over the work environment, and trust in the administration (Allensworth, 2012; Meister, 2010; Norton, 1999). There are other influences in the development of self-efficacy including one's mental statements that describe the world as well as standards used to "evaluate the goodness of a person, place, or thing" (Wise, 2007, p. 842). A positive working environment, self-efficacy in teaching, and optimism when working with students may contribute to the retention in teaching.

Retention In Teaching

"Teacher retention has become a national crisis" (Gujarati, 2012, p. 218). It is estimated that 12% of the teaching workforce changes positions and that number includes both the movers and leavers (Alliance for Excellence Education [AEE], 2008). Leavers are generally unhappy with the working condition and administration. "Teachers have been asked to do more with less and less" (Meister, 2010, p. 881) since the downturn of the economy in 2008.

Some teachers have remained in the same classroom, using the same books, presentations, curriculum, and tests for many years; the only things that actually change are their students. Beginning teachers are routinely assigned the most difficult grades and subjects (ninth-grade science), full of low-performing students at risk of falling behind or dropping out (Norton, 1999). Teaching in difficult circumstances with little support makes their teaching more difficult and challenging, leaving the teacher feeling ineffective. "Teachers tend to leave schools where they feel ineffective" (Allensworth, 2012, p. 30). There is a human toll on the students, parents, and the climate of the school, which is difficult to quantify with teacher turnover. The cost of teacher turnover goes far

beyond the impact of lost dollars (Gujarati, 2012). Norton (1999) stated, “Work condition such as administrative leadership and support, school climate, teacher autonomy in the classroom, student behavior, and parental support are directly associated with the job satisfaction of teacher” (p. 52) are all impacted with a large turnover of teachers at a particular school site.

Teachers supported by a leadership team and part of the school community stay in education longer (Minarik et al., 2003). A school leadership team providing “connectedness, relationships, and collaborative professional interaction to create meaning and improve intrinsic rewards...will increase its employee retention rate” (Minarik et al., 2003, p. 4). When teachers feel they are part of the school community and contribute to the overall well being of the other individuals beyond the students they are more likely to remain at the school. “Teachers need a community of friends” (Meister, 2010, p. 894) at their place of employment.

“The teaching profession has been characterized as a profession that eats its young” (Minarik et al., 2003, p. 230) especially those teaching in marginal subjects. New teachers in marginal subjects may not have other teachers in their same subject with whom to connect, leaving the new teacher feeling isolated and alone (Shoulders & Myer, 2011). In many schools, there may only be one agricultural education teacher, so the agricultural education teachers look outside their schools for mentors. Marginal subject teachers, such as agricultural education teachers, are known to “stick together” (McCracken & Etuk, 1986, p. 6) with other agricultural education teachers who are from other schools in their district or area. They may not build the necessary on-site school relationships to feel connected.

Implementing the most effective pedagogy, learning about students, and the school and the community development young teachers must do is difficult without a strong support system and appears to compound stresses for the beginning teacher (Allensworth, 2012). Another stressor for beginning teachers is that “teacher evaluation systems that judge teachers without regard to context can further disincentivize teaching” (Allensworth, 2012, p. 2). It is not that the beginning teachers are not willing to improve. In fact, according to Coggshall et al. (2010), “Teachers expressed a desire to be observed and critiqued to strengthen their own teaching and keep them accountable for their professional development” (p. 14). Allensworth (2012) suggested all teachers, whether effective or ineffective in the classroom, make improvements “when teachers develop collaborative relationships among school leaders and families” (p. 3).

Ability to influence their school and school community. “School districts and schools do not become employers of choice by chance; effective leadership must create a culture that promotes, supports, and reinforces the vision of the school to influence teacher retention ” (Minarik et al., 2003, p. 232). A teacher’s decision to stay or leave a particular school is contingent on a variety of factors ranging from a teacher’s personal characteristics to satisfaction with the school’s environment (AEE, 2008). When a teacher’s strengths are recognized and utilized at a particular school site, the teacher feels valued. According to Coggshall et al. (2010), schools that offer incentives to improve the overall school have more buy-in from all the teachers. Furthermore, Minarik et al. (2003) stated, “an effective principal will foster professional growth, risk-taking behaviors, and active involvement in the education community” (p. 232).

One of the benefits of becoming a teacher is the autonomy the teacher has in the classroom, but “time alone in the classroom is not sufficient for teachers to make progress” (Schneider & Plasman, 2011, p. 556). When teachers are left alone in their rooms, they feel isolated. Allensworth (2012) identified isolation as a lack of support around their instruction and identifies collaboration as “methods for better practice” (p. 30). Another form of isolation for teachers in secondary schools is teaching marginal subjects (Shoulders & Myer, 2011). Schools that do not encourage collaboration may get stuck in a “turnover cycle of teachers leaving because there is a poor school climate” (Allensworth, 2012, p. 31).

There are challenges in teaching whether an individual is a beginning or an experienced teacher. The challenges may be at the individual, school, or community level. Individually, teachers may become frustrated with rotating administration, learning new school-wide programs and new teacher and student expectations. There may also be the opposite, that teachers become very self-sufficient and work collaboratively to maintain the continuity of the school with a rotating administration. Teachers who are well grounded to the school generally take part in community events, and activities may further be impacted by the administration giving new teachers difficult assignments that at times prevent success (Norton, 1999). The more experiences student teachers are involved in during their practicum, the better prepared they will be as teachers to handle challenges of the teaching profession. The better-prepared teachers are during their student teaching practicum, the more likely they will enjoy teaching and stay in the profession. Furthermore, “teachers are more likely to stay in a school if they see themselves as part of a team that is working together toward making their school better,

supported by school leadership” (Allensworth, 2012, p. 30). One way the school leadership team supports teachers is through effective professional development.

Professional development. Literature on teacher professional development identifies how it relates to the self-efficacy of teachers and ultimately teacher retention (Wise, 2007). Professional development helps “bridge the gap between theory and practice” (Margolin, 2011, p. 7) and develops skills to be effective in the classroom. However, Shoulders and Myers (2011) found teachers are not gaining as much as they could from current professional developments activities. Carroll and Foster (2010) identified that 20% of the beginning teachers are leaving before their fourth year, before they “had time to become proficient educators who know how to work with their colleagues to improve student learning” (p. 4). According to Schneider and Plasman (2011), “Teachers move from initial experiences with learners in their preservice programs to induction programs for new teachers to professional development programs for continuing teachers” (p. 534).

Professional development is general and for all teachers. It is based around the basic issues of teaching: classroom management, increasing academic performance, committing to students beyond the classroom, and maintaining safe environments for students (Meister, 2010). Teachers in marginal subject areas such as Agriculture, Band, or Art may need different types of professional development. For example, a teacher in marginal subject may need skills beyond the typical classroom as part of their professional development. The “one-size-fits-all” approach of professional development does not give the skills necessary for teachers in marginal subjects or different professional phases of their career.

Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos (2009) advocate for professional development that is continual and focused to improve student learning and decrease student achievement gaps, leaving the marginal subject teachers to “figure out” how their subjects fit into the goals of the professional development provided. “Teachers view student success, both academically and socially, as the most important part of their work, administrators need to use this knowledge to create ways to engage teachers in professional development” (Meister, 2010, p. 894).

Summary

There are several influences on the self-efficacy of teachers; intrinsic and extrinsic factors may affect a teacher’s perception of their own teaching. TPP and the influence of cooperating teachers have a direct effect on the pre-service teachers’ values and beliefs about the classroom, FFA, SAE, agricultural program management, and professional development. Teachers experience three professional phases of teaching. Although teachers may dip in self-efficacy directly following their student teaching by the third or fourth year, they are back in the rhythm of teaching and their self-efficacy increases. As the teacher self-efficacy increases, so does the retention of teachers.

It is a choice to become an agricultural education teacher, to take on the different responsibilities associated with the profession. Teaching is an autonomous activity, but everything beyond the classroom and laboratory requires collaboration. In agricultural education, teachers work with staff and administration, similar to other secondary teachers, but they must also learn to work with community members and California Department of Education consultants to do their job effectively. Finally, the agricultural

education teacher's TPP and perception of their ability leads to self-efficacy and ultimately retention in the profession.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of agricultural education teachers at the high school level, seeking to understand agricultural education teachers' choice of profession, the events and activities that contribute to self-efficacy as well as longevity in the profession. The qualitative research methodology was used in the interviews, observations, and artifact analysis.

The following questions guided the research:

1. What experiences led current agricultural education teachers to choose the profession?
2. What experiences during a teacher's tenure in agricultural education affect self-efficacy?
3. What experiences contribute to greater longevity in the agricultural education profession?

Agricultural education has experienced a shortage of teachers caused by both recruitment and retention in the profession. The responsibilities of the agriculture teachers go beyond the typical school day and extend to the weekend. The in-depth, semi-structured interviews, observations, and collection of artifacts utilized in this study sought to provide insight into the longevity of agricultural education teachers. Chapter 3 provides the research methodology used in this study. This chapter begins with the introduction of the research design and rationale, followed by the description of site and population, research methods, and ethical considerations.

Research Methods

This phenomenological study sought to explore the experiences and perspectives of agricultural education teachers to develop an understanding of why agricultural education was their career choice and recognize the events and activities that contributed to their self-efficacy and longevity in the profession. According to Moustakas (1994), “evidence of phenomenological research is derived from the first person reports of life experience” (p. 84). Merriam (2002) stated the fundamental distinguishing quality of “qualitative research is that individuals construct reality in interactions with their social worlds” (p. 37). Using the “process question to identify the causation” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 75) in the qualitative research will allow the researcher to understand the participant’s choice to become an agricultural education teacher and the activities and events leading to longevity in the profession.

The researcher is in agricultural education and will need to be aware of personal assumptions, judgments, or prejudices brought with her into the study. In seeking to understand the lived experiences of the research subjects, the researcher bracketed (set aside) assumptions, beliefs, and values to guard against “intersubjectivity” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 37). This can be done through “bracketing” or suspending judgment through *epoche* (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994), *epoche* means “everyday understandings, judgments and knowing are set aside, and the phenomena are revisited” (p. 33) through the words and messages of the participants. According to Moustakas (1994), “looking before judging and clearing a space within ourselves so we can actually see what is before us and in us” (p. 60) is the process of understanding the meaning presented in the interviews.

Methods included analysis and reflection from the in-depth, semi-structured interviews, observations, artifacts, and field notes. The interview protocol is structured around the research questions in Chapter 1 to provide the lived experience of agricultural education teachers and draw out additional information. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed through “In Vivo Coding, honoring the participant’s voice” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 74). In Vivo Coding is the first cycle of data analysis allowing the participants’ voices to be heard. Themes from the interviews were analyzed in relationship to the observations and artifacts from the agricultural education teacher program site. Triangulation between the interview, observation, and artifact review was practiced to establish reliability. Findings were used to inform the conclusions and recommendations.

Site and Population

Population Description

The entire population of secondary and post secondary agricultural education teachers and members of the CATA is 716. Of the 716 members, 688 teach at the secondary level. There are only 305 high school agricultural education programs in California out of over 1500 public high schools. These teachers educate over 70,000 high school students in California (CDE, 2013). In 2012, the percentage of agricultural education teachers in each professional life phase is represented in Table 2.

Table 2

Percent of Agricultural Education Teachers in the Professional Life Phases

PLP	Years of Experience	% of Agricultural Education Teachers	Description
1	0-3	35 (243)	Commitment: Support and Challenge
	4-7		Identity and Efficacy in Classroom
2	8-15	35 (243)	Managing Changes in Role and Identity: Growing Tensions and Transitions
	16-23	15 (103)	Work-life Tensions: Challenges to Motivation and Commitment
	24-30	15 (99)	Challenge to Sustaining Motivation
3	31+		Sustaining/Declining Motivation, Ability to Cope with Change, Looking to Retire

Site Description

The study was not limited to any particular site or district. The commonality was employment as an agricultural education teacher in a public high school and membership in the professional association CATA.

Site Access

Since there was not a designated site for the study, issues of site access did not occur in this study.

Research Design and Rationale**Description on Methods Used**

The three guiding questions were explored through in-depth semi-structured interview, observations, and artifacts. The details of the methods are further elaborated to

include description of instrument, participant selection, identification, invitation, and data collection process.

Semi-structured interviews. Eleven in-depth, semi-structured interviews lasted from 45 to 90 minutes in length to obtain information about lived experiences and phenomena that led agricultural education teachers to enter teaching as well as their perceptions of events and activities that contributed to both self-efficacy and longevity in the profession.

Instrument description. Twelve semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix A) opened the dialog about agricultural education. Additional questions emerged from the conversations to enrich the discussion and gather further information.

Participant selection. The selection of 10-12 participants for the interview process was based on a purposeful, criterion sampling identified by years of service; two interviewees per category were selected based on their Years of Service received at the 2012 or 2013 CATA Conference. The years of service included years 15, 20, 25, 30, and 35.

Identification and invitation. Participants were selected through purposeful, criterion sampling by years of service. Participants were CATA members, and the assumption was that members were involved in the following areas: (a) classroom, (b) FFA advisor, (c) supervising SAE projects, (d) managing agricultural education programs, and (e) professional development in the CATA by personal or student awards. Participants were invited by email invitation (see Appendix B) that described the study's purpose and approach and informed them of the confidentiality of participants. A follow-up phone call ascertained those willing to participate. Interviewees were asked to

complete a consent form (see Appendix C) prior to being interviewed. Those who did not wish to participate were replaced with others on the list.

Data collection. Data were collected through interview notes, video recordings, audio recordings, and verbatim transcription. The interview followed the semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A). While the interview was taking place, each interviewee was recorded by two devices (video and audio), and the researcher took notes during the interview regarding non-verbal behaviors related to the questions. For those at a distance of more than 100 miles, interviews were conducted via SKYPE using both audio and video elements. Following the interview, the audio recording was transcribed verbatim; the observation notes were added in parentheses within the transcription. All data were saved, backed up, and stored in a locked drawer at the Principal Investigator's office to assure confidentiality.

Data analysis. Recordings were transcribed verbatim for data analysis. The "In Vivo" method was used to "literally code" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 74) the transcripts to identify themes that arose from each question. According to Creswell (2008), "coding is the process of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data" (p. 251). The researcher hand-coded the transcribed script after each interview and continued to identify themes and patterns that emerged from the interviews.

Observations. The phenomenon of observing the participants in their agricultural department (office, classroom, and facilities) combined with the in-depth semi-structured interviews will give an understanding of the lived experience of an agricultural education teacher.

Instrument description. A tour of the agricultural department office, classroom and agricultural facilities was filmed. Observing the place of employment gave additional information that may not be present in the interview.

Participant selection. The agricultural education teachers participating in the interview also participated in the observations of place of employment, including office, classroom, and agricultural facilities used as learning laboratories. The observations gave additional information that may not be presented by the interviewee.

Identification and invitation. Observations occurred after the interview as the concluding question.

Data collection. Observations of the classroom and agricultural program facilities were photographed and video taped upon completion of the interview.

Artifacts. The artifacts include any procedural or organizational documents, which may be from or related to the classroom, FFA, SAE, or agricultural program.

Instrument description. Artifacts were gathered from each of the participants' school sites. The artifacts allow for a deeper understanding of the expectations of the agricultural education teacher's self and those he or she interacts with during a typical day.

Participant selection. Artifacts may include: Classroom syllabi; FFA-program of activities, officer agreement/contracts; SAE-project visits forms and contracts; and agricultural department-schedule of teacher's duties; etc.

Identification and invitation. Following the interview, the interviewer asked for documentation that was given to staff, students, parents, administration, or school board. The artifacts were used to support the information gathered from the interviews.

Data collection. Data were collected, coded, and categorized by the organizational areas of classroom, FFA, SAE, agricultural department, and professional development.

Researcher's journal. The researcher's journal gave insight and understanding to the responses and perceptions that occurred during the interviews as well as the internal process of the researcher's bracketing during and after the interviews. The researcher's journal was used to help the researcher identify when intersubjectivity may have limited an open approach to data analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

The qualitative data were transcribed verbatim from the interviewees, and the data underwent a systematic process to help the researcher understand the lived experiences of why people enter the agricultural education profession and what phenomena contribute to their self-efficacy as teachers and tenure in the profession. By reviewing the transcripts several times, emerging themes were identified. The data gathered were synthesized to determine findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Interview coding. In Vivo Coding (Saldaña, 2009) of the data collected from each of the interviews was used to identify words or topics that appeared in each answer and that ultimately developed into themes. The themes were compared across the interviews to identify patterns that arose. Further categorization of the themes was done to identify "theoretical constructs" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 142).

Data interpretation. The interview transcripts did "consist of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data to themes and finally representing the data in a discussion" (Creswell, 2007, p. 148). The description of the themes of

“personal experiences” (Creswell, 2007) was further and thoroughly assessed during the process.

Validity. “Engaging in multiple measures, such as observation, interviews, and recordings will lead to more valid, reliable and diverse construction of realities” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 604). The multiple measures allowed for “lived experiences” of the participants to be fully explored.

Stages of Data Collection

Data collection and analysis were conducted after approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from Drexel University. Table 3 is the timeline for data analysis and reporting.

Table 3

Data Collection Stages

Activity	Date	Objective
Developed Research Proposal	June 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit to SP
Committee Review & Revision	July 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit for approval to dissertation committee
IRB Certification – Drexel University	August 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirement to being the research process
Secure Participants	September 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purposeful, criterion identification of participants • Sent out emails of invitation to participate • Followed by phone call within three days to confirm participation and set up interview time and date
Conduct & Transcribe Interviews Collect Artifacts	October – December 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informed consent signed by participants • Interview protocol with video and audio recording • Transcribe interviews verbatim • Collect artifacts during the interview • If necessary follow up phone call for clarification • Thank you to participants
Analyzing Interviews	January – March 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Vivo Coding • Note observations during the interviews • Bracketing, epoche, and intersubjectivity explored during analysis
Synthesis Interviews (Chapter 4 write-up)	March – May 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Findings synthesized
Develop Conclusions (Chapter 5 write up)	May – July 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conclusions and recommendations • Future studies
Defense of Dissertation	August 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present Dissertation to Committee

Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations in phenomenology research study were important to the success of this study. The greatest ethical issue is to do no harm to the small population of interviewees. The small number of interviewees requires complete confidentiality. No names or schools were associated with the individuals; all personal identifiers were removed prior to the publishing of the report. The participants chose pseudonyms to use for the study. Therefore, individuals reading the report will be unable to identify the interviewees.

There are also ethical issues related to the researcher to guard against bias during the interviewing and data gathering, to avoid forming judgments about the interviewee or the agricultural program, i.e., to come from a place of epoche.

The IRB requirements by Drexel University were strictly followed to assure the rights of all participants in the study were protected. The interview individuals formally consented to participate in the research study by signing a consent form prior to the interview to clarify that the involvement was voluntary and it was the right of the participant to withdraw at any time during the interview or study. All interview participants will remain confidential with no personal identifiers; personal names, school names, or location of the school are not listed.

Original data will be stored on a thumb drive in a locked cabinet in the Principal Investigator's office at Drexel University, Sacramento. The Principal Investigator will maintain one copy of the data. Both electronic data, stored on thumb drives, and paper copies will be stored up to three years after the study has concluded.

Chapter 4: Findings, Results, and Interpretations

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of agricultural education teachers at the high school level, seeking to understand agricultural education teachers' choice of profession, the events and activities that contribute to self-efficacy as well as longevity in the profession. Eleven agricultural education teachers with 15–35 years of teaching experience participated in the study, took part in a semi-structured one-to-one interview, and provided artifacts that reflected aspects of their professional experiences. In addition, the researcher noted observations during the interviews.

Using InVivo coding, each of the transcribed interviews was analyzed. The first round of coding was done one individual at a time. For the second round of coding, the researcher read across all the transcripts and identified repetitive or recurring words and phases to develop themes and subthemes. Themes and subthemes emerged from the transcript analyses. In addition, artifacts provided by the participants or observed on display in their agricultural departments were analyzed to add to the transcription data.

Participant Introductions

Eleven agricultural education teachers participated in the study. Table 4 summarizes the backgrounds of the participants, including (a) gender, (b) FFA membership during high school, (c) their undergraduate major, (d) specification of having student taught or interned in support of the teaching credential, (e) whether a Master's degree was earned, (f) number of high schools where they have taught, and (g) lastly, (h) if their own children were part of their agricultural education program.

Table 4

Background of Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	High School FFA Member	Under-graduate Major	Student Taught or Internship	Masters Degree Earned?	Number of Schools Worked	Own Children in Ag Ed Program
Cher	Female	Yes	Agricultural Science	Student Taught	Yes	2	Yes
Cole	Male	Yes	Plant Sci/ Agricultural Science	Student Taught	Yes	1	Yes
Dave	Male	Yes	Agricultural Science	Student Taught	Yes	1	No
Jack	Male	No	Animal Science	Student Taught	Yes	3	Yes
Kelly	Female	Yes	Agricultural Economics	Student Taught	No	5	Yes
Kyle	Male	No	Animal Science	Student Taught	Yes	1	Yes
Mac	Male	No	Agricultural Business	Internship	No	3	Yes
Mason	Male	Yes	Agricultural Science	Student Taught	Yes	2	Yes
Sam	Male	Yes	Animal Science	Student Taught	No	2	Yes
Scott	Male	Yes	Agricultural Business	Internship	Yes	2	Yes
Steffi	Female	Yes	Agricultural Education	Internship	Yes	2	No

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this research:

1. What experiences led current agricultural education teachers to choose the profession?
2. What experiences during a teacher's tenure in agricultural education affect self-efficacy?

3. What experiences contribute to greater longevity in the agricultural education profession?

Findings

The findings presented in this chapter emerged from the coding and analysis of the data. Four major themes emerged from a triangulation of the data from semi-structured interviews, observations, and artifacts and are presented as findings: (a) passion was expressed through an on-going commitment; (b) priorities are the basis for longevity; (c) relationships contribute to efficacy, effectiveness, and longevity; and (d) building capacity in students strengthens ongoing relationships. Each finding is supported with sub-findings, and these are detailed in Figure 4 and described in full detail in this chapter.

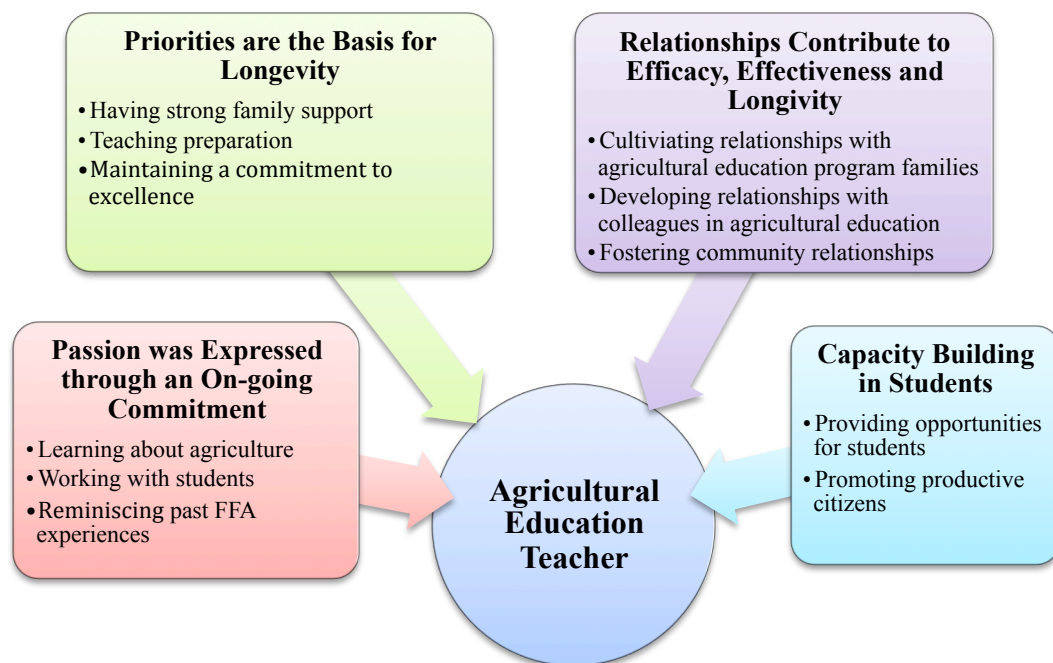


Figure 4. Themes and subthemes.

Passion was Expressed through Ongoing Commitment

All 11 of the study participants expressed a passion for agriculture and for working with students and identified this as the reason they entered agricultural education as well as why they have stayed. Their enthusiasm and commitment were related to the learning about agriculture, working with students, and reminiscing about past FFA experiences.

Learning about agriculture. All the study participants majored in agriculture, but not all initially knew they wanted to be teachers. Two of the participants, Cher and Steffi, noted they had decided to be agricultural teachers when their high school agricultural teachers encouraged it. Cher noted:

I loved agriculture, my family raised commercial cows...It was, like, I could combine the things that I loved, working with people and then doing the animal thing at the same time, and that's really what it has ended up [happening] these last 21 years. (Cher)

Steffi gave a big smile and described the day she knew she wanted to become an agricultural education teacher:

I can recall, not a lot of things, but I really remember the day I decided I wanted to be an agriculture teacher. And I really wanted and continued to want to be, (an) agriculture teacher with a passion to teach kids. For me teaching is still about the kids come first. (Steffi)

Mason was an agricultural science major in college. He had not considered becoming an agricultural education teacher during his initial studies. Wanting to drop an agricultural course in college, he met with his agricultural education professor who encouraged him to not only to stay in the course, but also suggested he consider agricultural education, specifically teaching as a career path. Kyle was an animal science

major in the university and was unaware of agricultural education as a possible profession until he and a friend took a livestock-judging course.

I really came about agricultural education a little bit differently. I didn't plan on being a teacher until I judged livestock. I was with the livestock coach and he spurred me along. It must have been something that he thought, that I would be a helpful kind of teacher. (Kyle)

Scott was majoring in agricultural business until an agricultural educator encouraged him to pursue a career in agricultural education.

I grew up on a dairy farm ... And then actually an agricultural educator was the one that convinced me that this was the path to choose... [it] was something that really came about after checking several other occupations out ... that's when I started to focus a little more in on agriculture [teaching]. ... I thought I would go more into the financial end the things or into sales coming out of my ag business major. But, as it turned out, having been offered a couple of jobs in industry, I pulled back and decided the best of both worlds was to be an ag teacher because you had a mix of inside promoting agriculture, as well as outside and being able to do the really fun things, that makes agriculture special and different. So I think that's how I really decided to be an ag teacher so I can have that good mix inside outside type of working environment. (Scott)

Mac and Jack were working in the agriculture industry—Mac as a farmer and Jack as a shepherd—and both enjoyed working with people and sharing their knowledge of agriculture. An agricultural university professor approached Mac at an agricultural event and encouraged him to pursue a career teaching in agricultural education.

I worked in the farming industry for five years, and had a great desire to work with young kids and at an agricultural function ... I met Dennis Hampton and he was a teacher educator at Chico State and he got me really interested in teaching. I went there for a visit and I said, “Yeah I think I want to be in here” and I really liked it so that's how I got started, and then I went to Chico State [and] got my credentials. (Mac)

Jack was loading sheep in a transport vehicle when his customer informed him that he had just accepted a position as an agricultural education teacher. This conversation led

Jack to also look into teaching, which then led to Jack's decision to pursue agricultural education.

Because I didn't get accepted to vet school, I took a job as a shepherd, because ... I thought it was really cool because I didn't know any shepherds ever. At the time I was newly married ... So this will give me some time to think about it about what I want to do and during that time as a shepherd I ran into a lot of different people. And, I remember one man in particular we had bought some rams from his ranch. And we were loading the rams into the truck and we were doing some vaccination work, which was experimental stuff that we were doing for the ranch. And I told him I worked for the University and I asked the guy, "what are you going to do?" And he said, "I want to be an ag teacher." And so, I said, "What is an ag teacher?" I've never heard of that and it was kind of a nice mixture of doing academic things, but also being outside with animals and particularly farm animals, which I was interested in. And I thought, that, maybe I should give that a try, because I'd only plan on staying a couple, three years [as a shepherd]. So then, I did a little research and a little homework and I found this guy named Dennis Hampton [university agricultural educator]. I talked to him on the phone... and I thought to myself that's what I want to do. (Jack)

Each of the participants had specific encouragement to pursue agricultural education as a career. Some made that decision as early as high school, while others made the decision to teach agricultural education in college or beyond.

Working with students. Every participant identified their students and the opportunities they had to work with students especially outside the classroom as the overwhelming reasons they continued to teach in agricultural education. Mac noted, "I've always enjoyed working in the agriculture field, and I've always enjoyed working with young adults, so that's why I teach." This sentiment was echoed by Steffi who described her passion for working with students, "For me teaching is still about (*pause*), the kids come first and there's a lot of different things we have to deal with in education." Dave articulated the joy he experienced in working with the students:

I think it's just lovely being around students... it's the stuff that we do outside of class and traveling to conferences and ... going to contests and just as simple as FFA meetings, just being around young people. (Dave)

While the classroom was seen as an essential part of their role, none of the participants spoke solely about classroom teaching as the reason they have remained in agricultural education. Some of the participants indicated the courses they enjoyed teaching the most were the ones in which they had the freedom to teach to students' needs. The participants described the satisfaction of teaching agriculture concepts through the FFA and SAE activities in which their students participated. They indicated that the primary role of an agricultural education teacher was to listen and identify the interests of the students, and then to provide those opportunities:

What are the kids interested in, because if they're [students] interested in something, then they tend to do better. That's where kids are successful, that's [why] I, we, have all these trophies (*pointing around the room*) and all these bowls [FFA State Champion trophies]. (Cole)

The agricultural education teachers described giving up family time and weekends to participate in field days across the state at different agricultural community colleges and universities to assure their students were fully engaged in the field of agriculture. All the participants discussed preparing students to participate in field days. Steffi described how she had taken students to every field day, "For example, when we go to field days, we are taking anywhere between 60 and 75 students to the field days. So we are bringing a charter bus to the field days for the last nine years."

Scott described working with students outside the classroom as rewarding, and suggested he had an opportunity for connecting with students inside the classroom that teachers of traditional subjects may not have.

And, that's the best event all the other things seeing students succeed in class. Getting phone calls from administration asking "what are you doing with this student, because you're the only class they want to come to or you're the only class that they are passing, what's going on?" Or when you have an IEP meeting and you get the parents in there and they are passing that on to you, and administration is [saying] "hey what are you doing?" And number one is I don't treat them differently and that's a real positive experience. I think that is what helps motivate and keeps me going ... And obviously I'm fortunate to have a lot of success with the FFA program as a coach; I love coaching. (Scott)

Giving students opportunities to specialize in an area of agriculture, to become their school's expert, the "best in the state or even the nation," were goals the agricultural education teachers strove to achieve during their students' tenure in high school.

Although the field days were discussed most frequently, the agricultural education teachers also spoke excitedly of opportunities to help students develop leadership skills and apply for individual awards and scholarships. Lastly, the participants spoke of helping students be successful in and out of the agricultural education classroom.

Reminiscing about past FFA experiences. Nine of the 11 participants had been FFA members themselves during high school. These nine fondly recalled their FFA experiences and the importance of the relationships they had with their agricultural education teachers. Although their stories varied, each of these nine spoke about the influence of their agricultural teacher while they were in high school. While none of these participants recalled classroom educational experiences from their own high school days, they each shared personal stories about what happened while participating in the FFA. When they allowed girls to join in 1969, Kelly was one of the first girls to actually join FFA and become an officer.

And so when they allowed girls in, I of course joined right away and I was one of the first girls ... to be an officer and one of the first girls to get a Santa Fe

Railroad Award and go to the National [FFA] Convention and walk across the stage and receive the America FFA Degree. (Kelly)

Mason remembered going to fairs and shows across the western United States:

I really enjoyed it because I got to travel all over the state and they took us to Arizona...Our FFA program, I had no idea, it was a good program: very strong, huge parental support. ... I'm not saying just at county fairs, I mean our ag teacher used to go to Cal Palace [San Francisco], in the spring, he took us to the California State Fair [in Sacramento]. We went to the LA County Fair, Arizona Nationals, Merced [County Fair], Chowchilla and Los Banos [Fair], and that's what we did [showed livestock]. (Mason)

Dave also described how his interest in agricultural education developed through showing animals and becoming an officer in the FFA.

Well, my high school ag teacher got me involved in showing animals, I think [that] was my first thing. I wasn't really active in FFA my freshman year. I think it all started when [I] exhibited [my hog] and [was] paid from [selling my hog at] the fair. I liked that and I became a little more involved as time progressed. I became an officer and those kinds of things. (Dave)

Cher described how her agricultural education teacher in high school became a valued part of her life.

My dad was a great dad but he was distant. My agricultural teacher really stepped in and helped me. Because I showed steers, and one year, they [the steers] were ... a real challenge ... I had a whole lot on my plate, so I had a hard sometimes, it was hard getting them halter broke [the steers]; and he would come out and help me with that. And, he just did a lot of cool stuff, ... him and his wife took us to UOP [University of Pacific] to watch volleyball games ... He just kind of mixed himself in everything we did. (Cher)

The two agricultural education teachers interviewed who were not in FFA programs during their own high school days suggested they missed out on something, as they were unable to share FFA experiences with their students. Kyle noted:

I know I will always be someone who is not in FFA in high school. ... But, those are still experiences ... I will never have. I've never been an FFA member, so during National FFA Week, when all the teachers bring their FFA jackets to share, I don't have that to share. (Kyle)

Whether in FFA or not, all the study participants spoke about experiences they had in high school. When the participants spoke of their involvement, they described the experiential activities they had during high school, not the cognitive ones. Those experiences were related to sports, clubs, and the FFA; not once did any of the participants mention a lesson from a class as the highlight of their high school education.

Theme summary. All the participants had a passion for agriculture, choosing agriculture as a major in college. They also recognized that they valued working with high school aged students and providing the students with opportunities they may not have had anywhere else during high school. The participants who were members of FFA in high school drew from their own high school experiences and expanded on those experiences for their students. Throughout the interviews, the participants expressed their deep commitment, enjoyment, and passion for agriculture, students, and FFA experiences.

Priorities are the Basis for Longevity

The study participants identified the importance of setting and honoring priorities as a basis for their length of service in agricultural education. Recurring priorities described by participants related to three key elements: (a) having strong family support, (b) teaching preparation, and (c) maintaining a commitment to excellence.

Having strong family support. Several participants identified the importance of having a strong support system at home and described how their own teaching priorities changed when they had children of their own. There was a joy in their voices as they spoke of having their own children in the agricultural program and helping them experience success in the program. Mac emphasized the importance of family first. He

expressed some remorse because this was not always the way he acted as a young teacher.

I think one thing that a lot of people might regret later on is you've got to put your family first; and for years I worked in agriculture and I coached football, and that was a lot, a lot of hours. Thank goodness I have a great wife and great kids, there's a lot of times where you just got to say, "No, I'm not doing this activity I am spending time with my family," so I really learned to do that a lot. (Mac)

Steffi spoke of how her priorities changed after having children; she described how her time spent at the school had to decrease.

[Staying late] had to change, because before I had children there wasn't as much to work around. And, so I would be here until 9:00 o'clock at night coaching Parli Pro [parliamentary procedure CDE] and all that, but now that I have children, I've had to work around that, that schedule ... but a supportive husband [helps] ... so he really gets it and understands the commitment and the time it takes and that is the biggest one. (Steffi)

Three of the participants recalled having their *own* children in their agricultural education program and the pride they had watching them receive awards and honors in FFA competitions and SAE projects. Taking his son to the National FFA Convention to compete was one of the highlights Jack spoke about in regard to his teaching career, "[I was] able to have my son in class (emotional), we wouldn't have won state finals without him" (Jack). Cole also indicated that the best part of his agricultural education career was when his son and his son's friends were on his CDE team and won state when he was their coach, "I just had the right group of kids. You always have extremely smart kids in programs, but it was different having your son on the team and having his friends on the team" (Cole).

Sam described having left agricultural education for several years to regain a sense of life balance and spend more time with his family.

An ex-agricultural education teacher convinced me that I should take some time to get myself back together ... my family life could have been better, I really needed to get to know my kids better. I was able to strengthen my marriage and strengthen my relationship with my kid. (Sam)

It was not until his daughter was attending the State FFA Convention and Sam had the opportunity to cross the stage with her that he realized how much he missed having an impact on the students. While he had stayed involved serving on high school agricultural advisory committees and as a 4-H leader, he realized at this time that it just was not the same. After spending several years as a volunteer, Sam went back into the profession of agricultural education with a renewed sense of commitment to both family and the profession. His decisions to both leave and return frame the issue of strong family support.

Teaching preparation. The participants emphasized the importance of being prepared to teach every day. Nine of the participants felt they learned how to be prepared to teach through their student teaching experiences. Eight of these nine described positive student teaching experiences. Not having any high school agricultural experience, Jack had been apprehensive about the agricultural education profession in the beginning, but as the years went on, that apprehension vanished; he loved the students and the challenge of engaging them.

First of all I had a terrific student teaching experience ... I figured out right off the bat I needed a full year [student teaching]. I wanted to see the full year from start to finish. So I did my observation, I asked ... if I could stay the entire [year] ... I want to know what an ag [teacher] does the whole thing ... I wanted to see for myself if I was getting into this profession I wanted to make sure that it was the right decision. The kids that I worked with are not what I remember from high school ... And I just kind of fell in love with the kind of students that were there [agricultural department] and in love with not only the work ethic, and also the lifestyle it provided ... I still enjoyed making the learning different. I look for things. I remember one instance [during student teaching] I was doing a project

on the overhead projector for goodness sakes, and everybody can put a picture on that they put on the acetate paper, but I love to put the overlays on things so that you could build something [with multiple pictures stacked] on the overhead. (Jack)

Kelly enjoyed her student teaching experience also. She knew her cooperating teacher because he was a teacher in a neighboring school.

It was a good experience ... [I knew my cooperating teacher] before I started student teaching [I knew him from high school activities] ... so it was just a two-person department at that time, and I would come in the morning, and he had Valley fever at the time and I would just have a note there that would say you're on today. And so I would have to take his duties and responsibilities. He was also a regional CATA officer and so there were times when I actually had to do that job as well. (Kelly)

Like Kelly, Dave also enjoyed his student teaching experience; his cooperating teacher gave him the freedom to grow as a classroom teacher and develop his own curriculum.

The nice thing about my cooperating teacher was he pretty much gave me the freedom to take curriculum in the direction I wanted to. He would kind of tell me these are the things we cover in this class, he never said, like, I had to do it a certain way. And I would just say that ... if we didn't have student teaching I couldn't imagine walking out of the doors of Cal Poly and walking into a classroom and trying to be a full-time teacher day one. (Dave)

Two participants, Steffi and Scott, had internships rather than a student teaching experience and both suggested that not having a formal student teaching experience may have limited their initial teaching and coaching experiences.

We were way over our heads (as interns). Thank goodness I had his [teaching partner] support and we did it together [took classes together], we didn't have student teaching. After being a master teacher, I reflected upon not doing student teaching, and I was like "whoa, that would've been very helpful." (Steffi)

Whether the participants student taught or did an internship, they all described a continued commitment to engage students through improving teaching methodologies, strategies, and content knowledge. All the participants reflected on their university

experiences and felt they had adequate to excellent preparation for teaching agricultural education.

Maintaining a commitment to excellence. While in their positions for 15–35 years, these teachers maintained a commitment to excellence. Cher described the commitment made to herself and her youngest daughter to continue to teach:

I've made a commitment, I will not leave agricultural teaching burnt out, I don't want to spend the last five years retired in the job, but I plan on teaching easily through when my daughter (now eight years old) graduates and that's a commitment. (Cher)

Other participants shared similar attitudes:

At this point, I'm not burnt out. I still look forward to, I look forward to the day, I look forward to the beginning of the school year, I look forward to meeting a new group of freshmen every year so as long as I'm doing that, [it] will be peachy keen. (Dave)

The participants expressed the desire to continue to be effective and engaged in their careers.

I want to do it as hard as I'm doing it now ... I don't know quite the word [to use], [I] care a lot, but I just want everything to be kind of like perfect, you know, I get upset if the kid's animal is sick, and sometimes I can't sleep at night, because I worry about stuff like the kid's animal, that stuff I've got to try to get better at because it's going to drive me bonkers. (Mason)

The most experienced teachers in the study (those with 25, 30, and 35 years of tenure) reiterated the importance of being effective in the classroom. Mac believed one way to remain effective was to continually change, “I [am] always looking to change, if you quit changing then your not going to be a very good teacher in the ... industry, even though the fundamentals do not change” (Mac). One of the changes described related to a change in attitudes or beliefs about who the students are now who participate in the program.

I think I've changed some of my attitudes about how to approach at-risk kids; how I approach nontraditional people coming into the classroom [and] into the profession. I think that's an important part of [the profession] that we need to attract nontraditional students, because our students are nontraditional. And if I would have kept this whole mindset of "it's got to be a traditional program" [only kids from farms] I probably would not exist right now. So, [I had to] change the way that I recruit, [now we no longer] recruit anymore based on their background in agriculture. [We recruit based on] "do I see potential in them?" I don't really care or think much about the [agricultural] industry potential, I see the student in a different light now. What can we provide for that particular student that will make them [a] more complete and whole person. (Jack)

All the study participants described valuing being effective in the classroom and continuing to modify what they were doing to assure a level of excellence. Although, none of the agriculture education teachers spoke of the classroom as being their favorite aspect of the teaching role, they described the classroom as being the foundation of a successful program. All of them worked to improve their craft both inside and outside the classroom.

The participants described another ongoing commitment to excellence by the focus on self-improvement through professional development. The participants described participating in professional development workshops, conferences, and activities, noting that these activities contributed to their professional and personal development. These experiences included continuing education and professional conferences offered by CATA, the agriculture industry, and educational programs.

Eight of the 11 participants earned a Masters degree. Six attended Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo Agriculture Science Masters program, attending summer session courses to obtain their degrees. They described the curriculum as highly relevant and related to agricultural education programs in California. Kyle noted that the summer sessions were "one of the biggest values." He went on to describe his enjoyment of meeting other

agricultural teachers throughout the state and learning about the different agricultural education programs. Mason also attended the summer session courses, noting he was able to “almost finish my Masters degree during the spring quarter, so it all worked out. I had good experiences [during my masters degree studies].”

All the participants were members of CATA and considered their level of participation in the organization as either average or above average. They spoke of opportunities through CATA for teacher support and professional development. Scott described CATA’s role to financially support and implement standards that have improved agricultural education departments over time.

I strongly believe in the CATA [support and professional development opportunities] ... I was there when there was proposition 13 and we had no money, and then when Ag Incentive [Grant] came about it made a big difference in ag teaching [by providing funding]. And I think it propelled us because then we had standards to go by. And I think we did a better job with the FFA. And I think it made teachers more accountable, so I think they certainly [CATA and Agricultural Incentive Grant] had a big part in making sure it happened. (Scott)

Several participants mentioned the CATA roadshow as being timely and beneficial, exposing the participants to topics that were highly relevant for their professional development.

To enhance her classroom teaching, Kelly attended a national conference sponsored by the National FFA Foundation. The experience energized her as a teacher, and, as a result, she brought this conference to California agricultural teachers.

You know, I think really the reason that I have stay [education] in it [agricultural education] so long is the Delta Conference. [It] was so good because it reminded me of why I was teaching. And it's easy to get in a rut after this many years ... falling back on failsafe things ... Sometimes at this stage you need something a little innovative, different. (Kelly)

Participants also spoke of conferences sponsored by industry and the value they offered toward their professional development. Kyle described the experience of going to a conference sponsored by the San Diego Wild Animal Park. This experience of studying and working with science teachers renewed his passion for the pedagogy of agricultural education.

That's one of the biggest values. ... I was able to ... go the San Diego Wild Animal Park and do an internship down there; it was four days. Basically staying in the park, I got to see behind the scenes there and that really just kind of gave me an introduction to time spent with science teachers. (Kyle)

Steffi attended a summer conference sponsored by the California Commission of Florists (CCF), a hands-on learning conference for teachers of floriculture:

We've had floral design presentations and stuff, but this actually allowed us to get our hands on things and [we were] making the products with the designer. That was really beneficial ... Last year [I] took the California certification floral examination prep class in San Francisco. And that was so beneficial! (Steffi)

Steffi was excited by the experience, and she indicated that she would have liked to see all the agricultural education teachers who were teaching floral understand the floral industry standards and have the opportunity for this certification. Mac attended a conference sponsored by National Center of Construction Education Research (NCCER) industry and adapted his teaching curriculum to match the industry needs they identified.

So after 20 years, I changed my whole curriculum and when I changed it to, it's called the NCCER, that's the National Center for Construction Education and Research. I went down to Los Angeles, our school district paid for me and I got certified as one of their instructors, and the NCCER has a whole curriculum for welding. (Mac)

Participants identified the need and desire to continually improve all components in their agricultural program: teaching, advising in FFA, supervision of projects, and running a program. Participants sought to enhance their knowledge and skills through

experiential classes, such as floriculture or agricultural mechanics. They described appreciating the opportunity to participate in industry conferences that enabled them to stay current.

Overcoming challenges. Participants spoke of challenges related to agricultural education and the reflective process that comes with challenges. The ability to overcome these challenges with parents, administrators, and school boards reinforced their commitment to excellence and remained a priority for them in order to assure the program's continuance. Kyle described the struggles with parents he believed interfered with their children's life lessons.

I would say and I always say that our job would be a lot easier without the parent situation. If our kids didn't have some of the baggage because of the home life that they have, more so that the parents wouldn't make excuses for their kids, or forgive kids for something they do. Sometimes kids just need to be punished, that's the biggest thing that we recently in the last few years. (Kyle)

Cole noted his challenge in working with a school board and administration that was not supportive of the agricultural education program.

Our biggest challenge, my biggest challenge, was soon we had a school board and an administration that was not supportive of the program; and we just kept chugging along, even though they were throwing monkey wrenches at us; and we took the high road and we won. We have survived the highs and lows, and were back up to a high. (Cole)

Scott further described how a frequent change of administrators required a need to continually educate colleagues, administrators, and school board members.

The biggest challenge that I've had is probably the educational process of new people coming into the school district. We talk about the importance of keeping everyone informed, but every school district is different. ... Kids are basically the same, the [agricultural education] programs are different, and I think as you get new administration coming in, depending on where they have been, it's a challenging process [to educate them] because the more time you spend doing that, the less time you have to spend with the students. And, that's my pet

peeve...The more that you have to do with anything [outside of the agricultural education program] it takes away ... from the kids, and that's probably been my biggest challenge. (Scott)

The participants expressed concerns with the decisions made by the administration or school board that affected the agricultural education programs. Steffi described the negative impact on student and parent relations that resulted from one administrative decision. “It's really hard for me, because I don't really agree with it [the decision] ... the standing the administration took, because it got really ugly [with the parents and students]” (Steffi).

Cher and Sam described the challenge of being a department chair of an agricultural education program. Cher noted that learning to be a department chair was difficult, political, and time consuming, requiring an ability to live through the tough times.

We had years when it's been ugly here [in the agricultural education department], such as school board members which are not fans of agricultural education, because of the cost associated with teaching students in this way. ... That has probably been the darkest days on campus here. It's like, when people treat you like, you're the elephant in the room...] money got tight and there was no raise, not this last time [2011] but earlier, this a while ago [2008], when teachers refer[ed] to us as “cancer on campus.” It is so hurtful, so hurtful. (Cher)

Scott faced different challenges, but suggested that his program was both strong and supported. He saw his role as department chair as requiring him to educate his administration. Once he was able to do that, the administration became the program's biggest advocates:

And I've been fortunate [and] built a good program a solid program here, but it's not one that hasn't come under challenge ... a principal, one time a few years back, the goal was to shut down vocational education in the whole school ... but it seemed like it was [targeted at agriculture] because we were the most dominant at the time, so it appeared that “You go after the strongest and the biggest and try to

get rid of them first.” He did this his first year and even a second year here, [it] was very challenging but fortunately, by his third year we were the best of buddies (laugh). (Scott)

Another challenge described by a few participants was around student enrollment.

Recruiting and retaining students in the agricultural education program was described as the way to assure the retention of agricultural education teacher(s) and programs. Dave noted, “enrollment, to make sure I'm a full-time agricultural teacher. We have a supportive administration who kind of helps make sure that that happens even when we do our recruiting efforts” (Dave). Recruitment and retention of students in the agricultural education program is critical for the wellbeing of the agriculture program.

A few participants spoke of the challenge of limited resources and extensive administrative and political requirements placed on them.

That is something I really struggle with at work, I'd much rather be here with kids then doing paperwork for the ag department, and then the whole politics thing. I'm always learning, spend(ing) a ton of time, more time than I thought it would [take], with people that aren't kids, I go to every school board meeting, I'm the liaison for the boosters... (Cher)

The time commitment required to do this job well appeared to erode some of the participants' enthusiasm for the agricultural education teaching profession. Two of the participants left agricultural education teaching for a period of time. Sam left agricultural education teaching because he believed he was burning out and needed to refocus on his health and family.

I actually took a break for six and half years, my health wasn't as good as it could've been so an ex-ag teacher convinced me that I should take some time to get myself back together ... my kids were really young ... so I could spend more time with them, because ... my family life could have been better. (Sam)

Sam described that the break allowed him to work on his physical and mental health, as well as his relationship with his wife and kids. Sam admitted, “[it] was a time when I really needed to get to know my kids better. I strengthened my marriage and strengthened my relationship with my kids.” Sam ultimately returned to agricultural education teaching after he chaperoned his daughter’s FFA chapter for the State FFA Convention and was inspired to return to agricultural education teaching.

Theme summary. Setting priorities appears to be an important basis for longevity in agricultural education. Support of family, being effective in the classroom, seeking opportunities for self-improvement, and overcoming challenges were articulated. The participants described how supportive families and various professional development events sponsored by CATA and industry were important to their success and enjoyment in the profession. Many discussed the challenges they faced specific to agricultural education teachers at the high school level. Setting priorities appeared to contribute to their tenure and longevity as agricultural education teachers.

Relationships Contribute to Efficacy, Effectiveness, and Longevity

Study participants identified relationships emerging from the following processes: (a) cultivating relationships with agricultural education program families, (b) developing relationships with agricultural education colleagues, and (c) fostering community relationships.

Cultivating relationships with agricultural education program families. The study participants all shared stories about the students who went through their agricultural programs. Many of the study participants had a collage of pictures located in a predominant place in their classroom or office. The collage of pictures included prom

pictures, senior portraits, pictures of students working, and students in their official FFA jackets. In addition, several of the teachers had framed pictures of the students who had achieved a high level of awards through FFA competitions or fairs and shows. During the interview, many of the participants looked to the collage or framed pictures as they spoke about students in their agricultural education programs. It appeared through their described experiences and their maintenance of photographic records that these participants valued the relationships they had built with students. Some described how after certain students graduated from high school, they continued a relationship.

When a former student invites you to, to a personal event in their life, like a wedding or invites you to come see their newborn child. So those are connections that I don't think other teachers in other core areas get to, get to experience as much as we do. (Dave)

When multiple children from one family went through the agricultural education program, the agricultural education teachers described spending years with those families, getting to know the entire family, not just the children in the class. Cher described how she sometimes established long-lasting relationship with both students and their families.

feeling connected to kids and their families. And over the years have become my close personal friends. And the kids when they grow up and they leave, they're my friends. My daughter's been in some of their weddings. So my kids call the students' parents aunt and uncle, it's just like this family thing, it sounds so cliché but that really is what it is. (Cher)

Mac believed the local support of parents and businesses in the community enabled him to do things he could not have done elsewhere.

One reason I stay at this high school is because, (pause) we have really good parents. In all the years I've been here, I've really never had any problems with parents. They are really supportive ... if you ask the parents, in this town, when you need something or help, you get it ... I would say the local agriculture

community, they have been really good here, too, and that is really beneficial. They've helped me a lot too. (Mac)

Kelly described how annually she met all the parents of incoming agricultural students by doing home visits. She indicated that each summer she spent about 30 minutes with the parents or guardian of every student enrolling as a freshman in her agricultural education program between the eighth and ninth grade years. In the conversations she shared with parents the opportunities available for their child in high school. She did not just speak of the agricultural opportunities, but all opportunities in the high school. She believed that whether the student stayed in the agricultural education program or not, the parents she met with would have a connection with at least one teacher at the high school.

I still do home visits. It doesn't matter which teacher [the student has] ... home visit is the most powerful tool we have and can do ... whether they end up in your program, the parents have a perception of us [agricultural education teachers as] caring about their kids. (Kelly)

It is evident that these agricultural teachers established strong connections with students in their agricultural education programs and with the students' families. The participants' interactions with the parents differed depending on the situation and the teacher's beliefs and actions.

Developing relationships with colleagues in agricultural education.

Participants referred to the "agricultural family" as all those in agricultural education from the beginning teachers to retirees. The agricultural family they described also included faculty and instructors in post-secondary education, as well as those in positions of agricultural leadership in the California Department of Education.

Cher has worked with numerous first- and second-year agricultural teaching partners. She described how working with young talented teaching partners kept her in the profession, “just really having great teaching partners, if I didn't work with great people, I would've been out a long time ago ... and with that support it makes it easy” (Cher). She described her ability to maintain relationships with teachers from a previous setting after she changed schools.

Even after I came here, my agricultural mechanics teaching partner was talking about different projects and I said, “I'm going down south, let me go see my cooperating teacher and he gave me so much stuff. I took pictures of [agricultural mechanics projects] so much, brought it back and shared with people here. (Cher)

Participants described their role in sharing knowledge in both formal and informal settings: “It was actually during skills week ... ag bio lab” (Steffi), “workshop at New Professionals” (Cher), and “I've done a lot of professional workshops for agricultural [education teachers]” (Mac). Scott noted the importance of CATA events.

Well let me see, number one is our CATA conferences and skills, easily rank above everything else for me. Especially my first 10-15 years, if I was not engaged in those first conferences and skills, I'm almost certain that I would not have had the success that I have been fortunate to have nor would I have stayed in the profession as long as I have. Not only did those conferences help me with curriculum activities, but also socially with my peers and the people I work with, it just made it fun to be involved. [I loved] to go to sectional meetings, to go to regional meetings, it was fun to do. (Scott)

Jack offered a poignant desire to share his acquired knowledge before he retires.

As I get close to the end of my career, I don't want to leave anything a secret. I sometimes get very angry when I offer and nobody responds because I think I have a lot to give and I don't want to leave this profession ... keeping a secret. I wanted everybody to know how to do this if I ever was good at anything I wanted them to know how I was good at it. And I've done a lot [workshops] and I do it often. The more time goes on and the closer I get to retirement, I start pounding the table, you better use it, because I'm taking it with me. (Jack)

Working with new teachers, participating and presenting workshops, and building relationships across the state were many of the experiences described by this group with significant longevity. As some approach their retirement, they are seeking ways to share their information as a legacy to others.

Fostering community relationships. When the study participants described their communities, they used words such as positive, supportive, and encouraging. Many of the participants explained that the community backing of the agricultural education program added to their enjoyment of teaching agriculture. Steffi worked in two communities where she experienced strong support for the agricultural education program and the FFA:

I have been blessed from the beginning to have a tradition that has been embedded in the community, that support of the agricultural program and the FFA. ... teaching has been a really great experience that has added to the motivation of our students that are involved in our chapter activities. (Steffi)

Mac, another participant, described the importance of support from the local community. “So I would say, the local agriculture community, they have been really good here to, and that is really beneficial. They've helped me a lot too” (Mac). Cole pointed out the value of becoming involved in the community in discussing a period when the agricultural education program was challenged by elected officials.

Make sure you have good community support, we do, we always have. It is just that the wrong people got elected and that was detrimental not only to our program but to the school district itself. There were some huge, huge problems that occurred because of that. A lot of animosity within the community and it was ugly and it did nobody, nobody benefited from that group of people [that were elected]. (Cole)

The community support may be called upon at various times to support the agricultural education program to keep it viable in the school.

Some of the participants acknowledged it was imperative to find the right members in the community to be part of a local advisory committee. Cher described she had to learn to “handle ... advisory committees ... what people to have on your advisory committees, how to have a well-run meeting, what their role and purposes are” (Cher). The advisory committee members were described as assisting the agricultural education teachers at school board meetings and noted that when necessary, they would validate the reasons to open or reopen a struggling agricultural education program. Mason was able to get a struggling agricultural education program back in the black because of the support from the local agricultural education committee. In four years, his program went from a struggling two-person department to a successful, thriving department with high student enrollment:

The parents kind of embraced me, took me in and the program started [to grow] ... I can't remember how many we started with but it was not a very big [program], maybe 100 kids, less than 20 students in each class when I first got there, and you know [the agricultural education teacher] was really good with the shop kids, but there was not a lot of like the leadership stuff ... and things like that. I kind of got there when they had some good local FFA advisory committee members that wanted the program to get on its feet. I just hit it off really well and then, I think in my fourth year [enrollment] was 200 and ... then we needed another agricultural teacher and we hired a third agricultural teacher. (Mason)

Theme summary. From the interviews, it is clear that three kinds of relationships served these teachers throughout their tenure: (a) with the students and their families, (b) with colleagues in agriculture, and (c) with the larger community. From their conversation, it appears relationships built with the students and their families, which in some cases led to lifetime friendships beyond the classroom, were most rewarding. According to the agricultural education teachers in the study, agricultural education programs are strengthened by the support of the local community.

Relationships with agricultural education colleagues were described as beneficial for sharing curriculum, ideas, and strategies to improve the agricultural education program. Based on the conversations, it appeared that relationships built with school colleagues and personnel were the most demanding, challenging, and needing to be fostered and promoted to assure the stability and success of the agricultural education program.

Building Capacity in Students Strengthens Ongoing Relationships

The participants were excited to speak about how the opportunities they provided in the agricultural education program assisted their students in acquiring confidence and self-assurance and led to their becoming productive citizens contributing to society.

Providing opportunities for students. All the study participants noted that one of the most important features of an agricultural education program was in providing opportunities beyond the classroom. The experiences may be leadership and or skills based and may include travel, recognition, or simply participation by the students. A few of the participants mentioned the value in giving students the chance to travel across the state or country noting that this was at times life changing for the students.

We took Okie kids that had never been on an airplane, you know, [we] took them to Louisville, it [National Convention] was in Louisville at that time. It had just moved and it ... showed them the world. And, you know, it was eye-opening and it was just something they'll [the students] never forget. (Mason)

The study participants referred to providing opportunities for their students through participation in FFA leadership and career development event (CDE) teams. Steffi enjoyed watching one of her students grow from an immature freshman to being elected to a National FFA Office her second year of college. Her student was an active

participant in leadership conferences and held officer roles at the local, sectional, regional, state, and national levels. The honor of having a National FFA Officer elected from her chapter was a most rewarding experience.

Watching her as a student in the classroom and seeing her excel and move on to that [national] level is quite rewarding and one of those blessings that I will continue [to remember]. Even after retirement, I will look back on it as an opportunity that I will never forget. Going to National Convention and experiencing that with her was unforgettable and remarkable. (Steffi)

All the study participants described their role in coaching and the excitement of winning awards at the state level suggesting that their students grew and learned how to be modest in winning and generous in defeat. Scott described how he coached CDE teams: “And obviously, I’m fortunate to have a lot of success with the FFA program [teams], as a coach, I love coaching” (Scott). Contributing to the students’ accomplishments in the leadership events and career development event teams was described with great pride. Davie noted, “I think some of my proudest moments ... is working with freshman and public speakers, especially Creed speakers; we have a great tradition [in our agricultural program] of our speakers advancing to the upper levels and being competitive” (Dave). Mason also described a student who became a Creed speaker, advancing from local to the state to the national levels.

The State Creed Contest. Back a few years [ago] and just working with [him]. He is a senior now. He just put so much time and effort [into learning the Creed]. And working with that young man and to see how much he progressed from, you know, starting in November to State Finals [in February] and then working with him for Nationals [in October], and just how proud and excited I was that he had won that event. (Mason)

Scott described the satisfaction of contributing to his students’ SAE projects, especially when the student was exhibiting at fairs and showed wearing the blue FFA jacket.

And, of course, fairs and shows ... We would do a lot of those and of course when you [your student's] win champion at the Junior Cal Palace back in the day that was a huge thing those are events that you they can't take away you see students succeed, it's just fun. (Scott)

The study participants became enthusiastic and animated when they spoke of their students' successes. There was a sense of satisfaction and pride when they accompanied the students to events and watched them be recognized for their skills and talent. Sam was effusive as he described his students' accomplishments:

And we went state fair several years and we got the Golden bear and we won at Merced 10 years straight in the agricultural mechanics [projects] with the outstanding welder, outstanding project, and then we were also able to get into the Fresno Fair, and I was able to get the kid stuff and really exhibited everywhere, I got people donating money for our banquet. ... So I would have a stack of stuff to give away to the kids [at the banquet]. Many of my kids went on to start their own businesses and some of them went to college and came back because it was something they could fall back to. And I ran the shop like it was a business, we just built stuff and I had a lot of help from the community so I built a lot of stuff. (Sam)

Jack described enjoying a student-centered classroom, incorporating FFA and SAE as teaching strategies to engage students.

The classroom is a great place to do performances [teach] ... and I use it to my advantage a lot of the time. The FFA and SAE are front and center, the heart and soul, of the [agricultural education] programs, because the FFA and SAE are student centered. And, as you know, if the classroom is student centered, it has a lot to do with the teacher. (Jack)

Dave described enjoying the out-of-classroom FFA competitions and activities as well as helping students with their SAE projects, but viewed the classroom activities as the foundation of the agricultural program.

From the classroom standpoint, I am always proud of the fact that I can be relied on to be prepared everyday. I am not somebody who's going to wing it, just walk in and say I don't know what I'm doing today. (Dave)

The participants described agricultural education as having many components, noting that properly preparing students for the next step beyond high school was essential. As a CTE program, Mac suggested that the courses were designed to prepare the students for college and careers.

You want to concentrate on doing a good job in that [classroom] area. Train your students for certain areas so they can get jobs, so they can get out of your program and they can get a job, period or to go to junior college and get your degree and go somewhere else. But train them and get them ready for that. (Mac)

Effective classroom teaching began during their student teaching experience for most of the agricultural education teachers. They described using the student teaching experiences for a springboard to engage students. They also continued to enhance their teaching skills through professional development. The participants with 15–20 years' tenure were fearful of not being effective for the remainder of their career; for those closer to retirement age, staying fully engaged was instrumental to their satisfaction with their role.

The study participants displayed pride and enjoyment when they spoke of the their students' accomplishments. When asked to name one of the most rewarding experiences during their tenure of teaching they all told a story relating to their students' success outside the classroom.

Developing productive citizens. All the study participants emphasized that the objective of agricultural education programs was college and career readiness. Mac described how a strong program raised the bar for student skills that led to college and careers.

I have my students for three years, and yes when they're done [agricultural mechanics program] if they want articulate with Butte College, they will get eight

college units ... this NCCER program has really raised the bar. Where we were (hand gesture low), now we are here (hand gesture high). And maybe every year, I don't have several outstanding welders, but overall my very best welder and my very worst welder are both very strong. A lot of guys do a really good job welding. And I can get them jobs so it really raises the bar for everybody. (Mac)

Describing the success of graduates from their agricultural education programs was a highlight for all of the participants. Kyle talked about a recent fundraiser in which past students told him what they were currently doing.

We had a big booster barbecue this weekend ... and having the students, both the superstars [I] remember and the ones that were kind of challenging come back and tell you [about their successes]. Gosh one of them I thought [he] was gonna' be the end of my career. (Kyle)

Knowing that the basic skills gained in the agricultural education classroom and honed in a community college ultimately enabled the student to become gainfully employed is very satisfying. Mac described the career path for his welding students.

Definitely, the most rewarding thing [is when a] senior student gets out in the real world and gets a job ... I've a lot of students now in their 20s. I've never seen so many welding jobs for such good pay, so a lot of students in their 20s and early 30s make \$100,000–\$150,000 per year. (Mac)

Agricultural education teachers in this study described their high expectations for their students in all three components of the agricultural education program cognitively in the classroom, affectively in FFA, and experientially through SAE projects. Participants were thrilled when past students returned and shared their life and career success. Many of the participants felt a sense of accomplishment. Scott shared what touched him as an agricultural education teacher.

I'm sure you've probably heard this before. Still the thing that touches me the most is when that student comes back to you [the school or agricultural education department event or department] ... maybe [the student] wasn't part of your state winning team or didn't get their state degree or wasn't an FFA solid achiever, but was a good solid program achiever; when those kids come back and walked

through that door, that to me, is my most touching experiences that I get. Just to say hello and to say thank you, those are by far [the most rewarding] and it happens every year. (Scott)

The participants noted that in addition to curriculum, building leadership skills and strengthening character in their students was important. Cher described how she encouraged her students to expand their relationships, “it’s kind of a mantra that we have with the kids is ‘how many new people did you meet today?’” (Cher). Dave spoke of the how pleased parents were when their children matured through the program.

We are building good leaders. They see their son or daughter being successful and being involved in something and maybe even eventually pursuing something that they never thought they would pursue. (Dave)

Theme summary. According to the study participants, there are many rewards for being an agricultural education teacher. The participants referred to student achievement in the classroom and FFA and SAE projects as being satisfying. Those accomplishments are pleasing, but knowing one had a positive effect on a student’s life and one directly impacted career options was particularly gratifying.

Building capacity in students through providing opportunities and developing productive citizens appears to be one of the primary objectives for agricultural education teachers. Their work with students happens in the classroom, travel, participating in leadership conferences, on CDE teams, and showing livestock at fairs and shows. Ultimately, through the various experiences their students develop agricultural knowledge and skills, leadership skills, and the characteristics necessary for employment or continuing education.

Summary of Findings

Throughout the interviews, the participants shared their thoughts about their longevity in agricultural education. All the participants in the study shared a passion for agriculture evidenced by their desire to continue to learn more about agriculture after high school and choosing a college major in agriculture. They also expressed their aspiration to work with high school students and shared the positive influence and impact their agricultural education program had on them.

Participants communicated that setting priorities early in their career contributed to their longevity. All the participants spoke of the importance of having supportive families who understood agricultural education programs. Although there are three components to agricultural education, the participants in the study appreciated their student teaching preparation preparing them to understand the importance of the classroom. Participants spoke of continuing to learn new skills and pedagogy to be current in the classroom, as well as to an effective advisor for the FFA and SAE; the study participants were all committed to continually improving themselves.

Participants conveyed that relationships at all levels enhanced their experience as an agricultural teacher. The relationships began with agricultural education colleagues from their student teaching and expanded to agricultural teachers across the state. The participants also developed relationships with students and their families, sometimes lasting long after the students had graduated from the program. Participants developed and nurtured relationships with their local community and business leaders. The positive relationships established at all levels by the participants contributed to efficacy, effectiveness, and longevity in the agricultural education profession.

Lastly, the agricultural education teachers interviewed spoke devotedly about their profession and the reward of building capital in the students they had the opportunity to teach. The participants all had stories of graduated students, now productive citizens, returning to an agricultural education department function and telling of the positive impact the agricultural education program had on their lives. The agricultural education participants all took pride in knowing they played a small part in contributing to the success of their students.

All the participants expressed a passion for agriculture, working with students and positive memories of their experiences in high school agricultural education programs. The participants expressed their student teaching experiences facilitated an efficacious beginning to their career as an agricultural education professional. The relationships the participants developed and continue to strengthen throughout their career aid their longevity. Lastly, past graduates expressed encouraging and reassuring words when speaking of the impact the agricultural education teachers and programs had on them. There was a sense of pride in the participants as they spoke of building capacity within their students.

Results and Interpretations

This portion of the chapter contains the results of the study, drawn from the themes, along with an interpretive discussion. Four results that emerge from the themes are discussed in relation to relevant literature. These results and the corresponding interpretations inform the recommendation offered in Chapter 5.

Result 1: Passion for agriculture and a desire to work with students influence longevity.

Agricultural education programs are unique; there are expectations beyond the typical high school classroom. Whether the agricultural education teacher was involved in an agricultural education program in high school or learned about agricultural programs in college, they all shared a passion for agriculture and for giving students opportunities. All the participants spoke of a passion for the subject and providing opportunities, they expressed a belief that they were having a positive influence on their students. According to Tschhannen-Moran and Woolfolk-Hoy (2001), a teacher's belief influences self-efficacy. Running an agricultural education program is not always easy but "beliefs influence teachers' persistence when things do not go smoothly and their resilience in the face of setbacks" (Tschhannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, p. 783). Agricultural education teachers had obstacles to their program from school boards, administrations, and colleagues at their school, but with resilience they were able to overcome those obstacles and provide opportunities to their students.

According to Lent and Brown (1996), social cognitive career theory (SCCT) "focuses on the processes through which (a) academic and career interest develop, (b) interests, in concert with other variables, promote career-relevant choices and (c) people attain varying levels of performance and persistence in their educational and career pursuits" (p. 311). As high school students, in college and early in their careers, these participants developed their academic and career interest in agriculture. All the participants' interests in agricultural and working with students aligned with the selection of agricultural education as their career.

Agricultural education is a career by choice, not by chance. Teachers in California must attend a fifth year of college to earn teaching credentials. Choosing to teach agricultural education is a choice to work beyond the classroom to provide opportunities to students. It is through the teaching in the classroom and providing opportunities by coaching CDE teams and supervising SAE project that agricultural education teachers develop differing levels of self-efficacy. The successes or failures of their students contributed to the self-efficacy as agricultural education teachers.

Result 2: Setting priorities and an ongoing commitment to excellence influence effectiveness and longevity.

The themes of this study revealed the importance of setting priorities early in one's agricultural education career. One of the relationships the agricultural education teacher must cultivate throughout his or her career is the relationship with family. It is necessary for agricultural education teachers to include and educate a spouse and children to the activities beyond the classroom. This inclusion allows for understanding about time commitments, integrates the family into out-of-class student activities, and becomes a basis for their own children's FFA involvement during high school.

Becoming part of the agricultural education family begins with student teaching. The relationship between the student teacher and cooperating teacher is the first exposure to the agricultural education profession. As Anderson (2007) and Osunde (1996) concluded, the student teacher will emulate the cooperating teacher and frequently may adopt the beliefs of the cooperating teachers; hence, it is important the cooperating teacher displays a positive attitude about classroom teaching, advising the FFA, and SAE projects.

This study suggests that agricultural education teachers are continually looking for ways to improve pedagogy. All the participants agreed on the importance of being effective in the classroom. Allensworth (2012) suggested that all teachers, whether effective or ineffective in the classroom, make improvements. Lent and Brown (1996) proposed teachers' self-efficacy may be achieved, though "personal goals help to guide, organize, and sustain a person's own efforts without external reinforcement" (p. 312). Lent and Brown (1996) concluded that the SCCT is a good predictor of career-related performance based on two areas: (a) level of attainment individuals achieve in their work task and (b) the degree to which they persist, despite obstacles, at a particular work activity or career path. Agricultural education participants attributed their longevity in the profession to both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. "Teaching efficacy is not a static phenomenon, but a dynamic measure affected by the student teaching experience, which is affected by teaching efficacy" (Roberts et al., 2010, p. 83).

According to Day (2007) in describing Professional Life Phases (PLP), the agricultural education participants fell into PLP 2 and 3. The study participants in the profession for 15 or 20 years were feeling the work-life tensions, and asking themselves if this was where they wanted to remain. All the study participants in the 15 to 20 years in the profession group wondered if they could keep their current pace up for the next 18-20 years. The participants with 25 to 30 years in the profession contradicted Day's PLP 3 level of Challenging to Sustaining Motivation. They did not seem to lack motivation to stay in agricultural education. They were enthusiastic and realistic about what they could accomplish with their students and in agricultural education. The study participants with 35 years of experience, PLP 3 Sustaining/Declining Motivation, did not reflect this in

their representations. They spoke of how they wanted to give back to the profession.

Participants had ideas for professional development workshops and engaging agricultural education teachers at various stages of their careers.

Result 3: Relationships influence efficacy and longevity.

The themes revealed that developing and managing relationships with the students and their families in the agricultural education program, agricultural education colleagues, school personnel, and community members are important to longevity in the agricultural education profession. This aligns with Minarik et al.'s (2003) conclusion that a school leadership team providing “connectedness, relationships, and collaborative professional interaction to create meaning and improve intrinsic rewards...will increase its employee retention rate” (p. 4).

Norton (1999) stated, “Work condition such as administrative leadership and support, school climate, teacher autonomy in the classroom, student behavior, and parental support are directly associated with the job satisfaction of teacher” (p. 52). Individually, agricultural education teachers described becoming frustrated with rotating administration, learning new school wide programs and new teacher and student expectations. “Teachers tend to leave schools where they feel ineffective” (Allensworth, 2012, p. 30).

Marginal subject teachers, such as agricultural education teachers, are known to “stick together” (McCracken & Etuk, 1986, p. 6) with other agricultural education teachers who are from other schools in their district or area. This study confirms that agricultural education builds relationships through participation in various professional meetings and conferences sponsored by CATA and agricultural industries. “Teachers

need a community of friends” (Meister, 2010, p. 894) at their school site as well as those teaching similar subject matter at other school sites. According to the study participants, attending professional workshops and conferences accomplishes two purposes—increasing knowledge and skills and developing a community of friends.

Result 4: Capacity building in students strengthens ongoing relationships

The agricultural education teacher assists in transforming students into college and career ready citizens. Agricultural education teachers work collaboratively with school leadership to support students in achieving career and life goals. Through a connectedness of achieving a common goal of improving the students, “teachers are more likely to stay in a school if they see themselves as part of a team that is working together toward making their school better, supported by school leadership” (Allensworth, 2012, p. 30).

Student success motivates the agricultural education teacher to continue to learn and grow in their profession. “Teachers view student success, both academically and socially, as the most important part of their work” (Meister, 2010, p. 894). One of the factors that plays into the teacher’s own judgment of student engagement and learning includes student success (Allensworth, 2012; Meister, 2010; Norton, 1999).

Summary

This chapter discussed the findings of the study and described four major results that emerged from the research. In addition to the findings, the results of the study were presented and interpreted through the lens of related literature in the field. Agricultural education teachers expressed a passion for agriculture, high school students, and past experiences in the FFA. These agricultural education teachers with 15–35 years of

experience identified the importance of setting priorities; family first, effective classroom teaching second, and continual self-improvement through professional development third. Relationships were also important for agricultural education teachers. The relationship the agricultural education teacher has with the students in the agricultural education program provides students with opportunities and direction for their lives. The relationships extended past the classroom with the parents, colleagues in the school and in agricultural education, administration, and community. Developing supportive and positive relationships with administration and community added to the agricultural education teachers' self-efficacy. Lastly, the theme of building capacity in their students is something they recognized as an important characteristic for those who have made agricultural education a lifetime career. Passion for agriculture and teaching, prioritizing, developing relationships, and building capacity is further discussed and recommendations are made to contribute to decreasing the chronic shortage of teachers within the agricultural education ranks. The trail of evidence provided in this chapter is the basis for this study's conclusions. In the next and final chapter, the themes, findings, results and interpretations provide a basis for offering conclusions and making recommendations.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of agricultural education teachers at the high school level, seeking to understand agricultural education teachers' choice of profession, the events and activities that contribute to self-efficacy as well as longevity in the profession.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What experiences led current agricultural education teachers to choose the profession?
2. What experiences during a teacher's tenure in agricultural education affect self-efficacy?
3. What experiences contribute to greater longevity in the agricultural education profession?

Eleven (11) agricultural education teachers, selected from those earning CATA Service Awards years for 15, 20, 25, 30, and 35 years of service, participated in this phenomenological study. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, field notes, and observations. They were interpreted with an analysis of relevant literature.

Through in-depth qualitative analysis, the phenomenon of career choice and longevity through the lived experiences of agricultural education teachers led to four findings: (a) passion for agriculture and desire to work with students, (b) setting priorities and ongoing commitment to excellence influence effectiveness and longevity, (c)

relationships influence efficacy and longevity, and (d) capacity building in students strengthens ongoing relationships. Results of the study were interpreted from the findings and situated within relevant literature.

Conclusions from this study were drawn from the research questions and the findings and were ultimately drawn from a synthesis of the perceptions and experiences related to the study participants. This chapter ends with recommendations for attracting and retaining individuals to the career of agricultural education as well as for further research.

Conclusions

Drawing from the trail of evidence presented in Chapter 4, the conclusions are provided in the context of responses to the three research questions.

Research Question 1: What experiences led current agricultural education teachers to choose the profession?

All the long-tenured participants were encouraged by someone to enter the career of agricultural education by either their agricultural education teacher or university professor. If their choice of career was made in high school, it guided their application to an agricultural junior college or university so they could pursue an agricultural major. When the participants shared the common experience of participating in high school FFA experiences, they reminisced about their agricultural teacher and the opportunities provided to them through their agricultural education program. A few participants identified that the career choice of teaching agricultural education was made during their undergraduate experience. However, some participants made the career choice after college to enter agricultural education. Whenever they made this choice in high school,

college, or post-college, all were personally encouraged by someone from within agricultural education.

Once they identified the desire to teach agricultural education, the participants pursued an agricultural education teaching credential through one of the five agricultural universities in California. All but two of the participants student taught in the traditional method under the supervision of the agricultural university. Two chose an internship opportunity to obtain their teaching credential in agriculture education and noted this made their entry to the profession more difficult.

Encouragement by someone in the agricultural education professional to enter agricultural education appears key to both entry and longevity in the profession. Experiences during student teaching more strongly reinforce the career choice to teach agricultural education. Agricultural education teachers in high school play an important role by encouraging agriculture CTE students to pursue an agricultural education career. Similarly, university professors play an equally important role in directly encouraging individuals to consider teaching in agricultural education as a career.

Research Question 2: What experiences during a teacher's tenure in agricultural education affect self-efficacy?

Agricultural education teachers' self-efficacy is affected by a multitude of experiences throughout their careers. The experiences most meaningful are (a) developing positive relationships with students, school administration, and community; (b) setting priorities that assure personal and family time; (c) developing classroom expertise; and (d) a commitment to career-long professional improvement.

Agricultural education teachers emphasize the importance of developing positive relationships with their students through opportunities outside the classroom. They stress the importance of educating their administration about the agricultural education program and the impact the program provides for students fostering buy-in and support for their efforts. They also focus on nurturing community support for the agricultural department. Establishing and maintaining these relationships contributes in part to the self-efficacy of the agricultural education teacher.

Balancing priorities between family, classroom, FFA, SAE projects, and professional development also contribute to the self-efficacy of the agricultural education teachers. They advise that agricultural teachers entering the profession need to make family a priority. By making family and life events priorities, the agricultural education teachers built a network of support with their spouses and other family members for their extended professional activities.

Agricultural education teachers spoke of professional development and industry workshops that kept their knowledge current and relevant and improved their pedagogy, ability to advise the FFA, ability to supervise SAE projects, and ability to run an effective agricultural education program. Lifelong education positively impacted the self-efficacy of the agricultural education teachers.

Agricultural education teachers make teaching a priority. They defined their role as educating students who participate in the agricultural education program with agricultural knowledge, overseeing the FFA and SAE activities that build character, and assuring career technical knowledge that serves graduates well into their adult lives.

They believe students in agriculture education programs learn more in their classes than elsewhere in the school.

Working conditions appear to have an effect on the development of self-efficacy in agricultural education teachers. When agriculture education teachers developed positive relationships with colleagues at their local school site and with other agricultural education teachers across the state, they spoke highly of their career choice. The relationships at the school site appear to enable the agricultural education teachers to work collaboratively and see themselves as valued members of the profession. Agricultural education teachers require voice in school practices and believe it is essential their voice be heard, respected, and valued by their colleagues and administration.

This research suggests that developing and maintaining self-efficacy is essential for agricultural education teacher longevity. Relationships, priorities, and working conditions all contribute to the development of self-efficacy. The same experiences that contribute to self-efficacy also appear to contribute to the longevity in the agricultural education profession.

Research Question 3: What experiences contribute to greater longevity in the agricultural education profession?

Developing, cultivating, and maintaining supportive relationships at the school, community, state, and professional levels is an essential practice for agricultural education teachers, ultimately contributing to their longevity. This support enables the agricultural education teachers to overcome challenges occurring at the school site level.

Agricultural education teachers actively educate high school administration and other school personnel about their agricultural program and how it develops college and

career readiness for students in the program. Agricultural educators who embrace educating administration move effectively through times when the program is being challenged, and this activity is key in transforming views and assuring continuing support.

As described in the first question, setting personal priorities contributes to longevity in the profession. The most commonly mentioned priority by the agricultural education teachers was *family first*. Stories were shared that described burnout and the decision to leave the profession when family and personal time were not maintained.

Experienced agricultural education teachers also prioritized developing and maintaining an effective classroom for their students that fostered career and college readiness. They described their ongoing commitment to staying current in the field believing that this best served the students. Maintaining a focus on capacity building in students is most important to the teachers' longevity. Continually building skills and knowledge, agricultural education teachers are committed to their students collectively and continuously investing in their future.

Although none of the agricultural education teachers used the words capacity building when describing their students, they described providing opportunities for their students to grow intellectually and with skills to prepare them for college and career readiness. Fullan (2008) defined building capacity in others "by attracting talented people and then you help them continually develop individually and collectively" (p. 63). That is exactly what agricultural education teachers do for their students, provide opportunities for them to become successful through instilling the importance of a positive attitude, hard work, and task completion whether related to academics in the

classroom, competitions through CDEs, or a leadership role in FFA, the agricultural education teachers believed they were making a difference in the lives of young people.

Agricultural education teachers expressed a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment when alumni reemerged and updated them on the events in their lives and shared stories on the impact the program had on the choices made. Agricultural education teachers expressed and exhibited an overpowering sense of pride and gratification knowing the positive impacts they have on their students' lives both during and beyond high school.

An agricultural teacher becomes aware of the impact and lifelong effect he or she has on graduates from agricultural education program in the years following graduation. This is truly what being an agricultural teacher is all about, making a difference in the lives of the youth in these programs. The agricultural education teachers with longevity in the profession have been and continue to be inspired by their graduates. It is not just the FFA rock stars, but also those students who have described having nowhere else where they felt comfortable and accepted during their high school years. These agricultural education teachers associate their positive feelings about teaching agricultural education with building capacity with the students.

Recommendations

Classroom teaching alone does not seem to entice or contribute to longevity of agricultural education teachers. Agricultural education programs reach far beyond the classroom including leadership development through the FFA, experiential learning with SAE projects, and working with community members and leaders. Given the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered to agricultural education teachers,

agricultural education leaders, and agricultural universities preparing agricultural education teachers to help attract and retain agricultural education teachers.

Actively Encourage Students to Become Agricultural Educators

Agricultural education teachers at all levels express a passion for agriculture, a passion for teaching and a passion for the past FFA experiences. It is recommended that agricultural education teachers be asked to consciously identify and encourage two students (annually) who evidence a passion for a career in agriculture and skills for teaching to pursue a career in agricultural education. Taking the time to personally suggest this as a career option provides an important influence and may increase the numbers of students who seek to enter the profession.

Sharing this information with program directors at agricultural junior colleges and universities will allow for ongoing support for these students. By identifying two students from each agricultural education program, teachers themselves may provide a potential annual talent pool of 632 candidates for the agricultural education profession, eliminating the shortage in California.

Establish Staged Professional Development

There are many priorities agricultural education teachers must sort out during their careers. Offering professional development workshops for agricultural education teachers specifically designed for their professional life phases will help agricultural teachers set the appropriate priorities for both personal and professional success. These professional development workshops will focus on various aspects of agricultural education including: (a) setting priorities and goals personally and professionally, (b) developing and maintaining life balance, (c) updating the teachers on current agricultural

trends, (d) developing strategies to improve classroom pedagogy, (e) new and engaging ways to involve all students in FFA and SAE, (f) guidance and assistance with applications and grants, (g) effective and new ways to run an agricultural program, and (h) mentoring young teachers. Additionally, the New Professional Conference offered to agricultural education teachers in years 1-3, should be held annually with topics focusing on building positive relationships with students, parents, and community members.

Create Mentor Programs that Support the Development of Life Balance Skills

Agricultural education teachers have numerous responsibilities and obligations in their agricultural education programs; it can be overwhelming and time consuming with all the components required. Understanding how to set priorities and balance life personally and professionally during the credential year is the beginning to setting that balance throughout their careers. Agricultural education TTP are encouraged to work with cooperating teachers to help young teachers learn to set priorities both personally and professionally that will lead to longevity in the profession. Young teachers in their first through fifth years of teaching should be mentored and supported by experienced agricultural education teachers who have been trained to mentor and assist the young teacher. Identifying successful agricultural education teachers with longevity as mentors in the profession serves two purposes, allowing the long-tenured teachers a forum to share tacit knowledge acquired during their career and providing life balance skills to new agricultural education teachers, leading to more staying in the profession.

Establish a State-Wide Effort to Gather Information on Program Impact

Agricultural education teachers engage, motivate, and develop their students to learn and excel. Rather than just the anecdotal research done independently, there needs

to be a state-wide effort to systematically gather information on students 5 and 10 years after graduation from high school agricultural education programs with a goal to identify the impact of the agricultural education programs on their lives as young professionals.

Summary

In California and nationally, there is a need to attract and retain agricultural education teachers at the high school level to assure agricultural education programs have teachers available who actively support the four components of agricultural education—classroom, FFA, and SAE projects and program management—and ensure the success of agricultural education at the high school level. This study explored the professional choice of agricultural education in long-tenured teachers and sought to understand how teacher preparation programs and their teaching experiences contributed to self-efficacy and longevity in teaching agricultural education. Teachers of agricultural education make a conscientious career choice to enter the profession. Once in the profession, only 25% last beyond the 15th year of teaching. Although some continue to teach some form of agriculture at the junior college or university levels, the majority move away from agricultural education altogether. The inability to retain agricultural education teachers is not unique to California; in fact, this nationwide problem may have detrimental effects on the number of agricultural programs open. Agriculture teachers may be tempted to pursue other careers for a variety of reasons, which this study did not address.

The agricultural education teachers with longevity had similar experiences that contributed to their tenure in the profession. When asked about positive experiences, they became enthusiastic and eager to share numerous student-related experiences.

Although all the agricultural education teachers faced challenges, no challenges were devastating to the career or the department. In fact, the agricultural teachers almost took it in stride, as just part of their career, continuing to educate.

Four recommendations for attracting, developing, and contributing to self-efficacy and longevity in agricultural education profession were identified through the trail of evidence presented in the findings and conclusions: (a) actively encourage students to become agriculture educators, (b) establish staged professional development, (c) create mentor programs that support the development of life balance skills, and (d) establish a state-wide effort to gather information on program impact.

Increasing the number of young teachers entering the profession is just the beginning. Once they have chosen the profession, it is essential to keep the effective agricultural education teachers in the profession. Using mentors to teach the importance of lifelong learning, prioritizing, developing positive relationships, and building capacity in students may contribute to the self-efficacy and longevity of agricultural education teachers. Providing professional development that meets the life stage needs of agricultural education may increase the self-efficacy and longevity. Lastly, continued research may inform constituents. Ultimately, by increasing the number of agricultural education teachers entering the profession and length of service, there will be a decrease the chronic shortage of California agricultural education teachers.

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Appendix A: Qualitative Interview Protocol

Name of Interviewee:

Date of Interview:

Interviewed by: Lynn Martindale

Time of Interview:

Location of Interview:

Years in the Agricultural education profession:

Major in college:

Agricultural education credential program:

Who was the most influential person during student teaching?

Who was the most influential teacher (mentor) after student teaching?

Interview Questions

1. Please describe the experiences that led you to choose the profession of agriculture education? Why did you choose the university you did for your credential program?
2. Please describe your student teaching experience(s) with your cooperating teachers and how the student teaching experience(s) prepared you for agricultural education profession.
3. Please describe any events, activities that you did during your student teaching either at the university or student teaching site that you still do, or make sure you don't do?
4. Please describe positive or rewarding events, activities, or situations that have occurred during your agriculture education teaching experience? How did you prepare for those events? ((a) classroom, (b) FFA, (c) SAE and/or d) agriculture program)

5. Please describe challenges you have faced during your tenure as an agricultural education teacher experience and if you changed or modified what you did after experiences the challenge. ((a) classroom, (b) FFA, (c) SAE and/or d) agriculture program)
6. How could you have been better prepared to face challenges?
7. What has been the most beneficial professional development that you participate in?
What made it beneficial to you at that time?
8. Have you ever been asked to give a professional development workshop? If so, in which area and how did you prepare? (a) Classroom, (b) FFA, (c) SAE and/or d) agriculture program.
9. What type of professional development workshop would be beneficial for you at this stage in your career?
10. Looking forward, where do you see yourself in 5-10 years from now?
11. Is there anything you would like to add?
12. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix B: Letter of Invitation to Participate Interviews

Dear _____:

Re: Dissertation Research Interview Participation Invitation

My name is Lynn Martindale, a doctoral candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Educational Leadership at Drexel University. I am writing to ask for your participation in my dissertation research study on the self-efficacy of agricultural teachers and their longevity in the profession. The findings of the study will be used to inform teacher preparation programs of agricultural education and agricultural education leaders about the best practices to improve the self-efficacy and longevity in the profession.

Your participation is requested for a 60-90 minute in-person interview with open-ended questions, followed by a tour of your agricultural facilities. There may be a brief follow-up telephone interview for clarification of your original answers in the in-person interview. Your interview is completely confidential and no identifiers of your responses will be included in the report of the study. Both the institution and individuals interviewed will be identified by pseudonym only. Hence, neither the location nor respondent will be identifiable.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. The interviews for the research will be ongoing during the months of August and September. I know that your time is valuable and I will do everything that I can to set a time that is most convenient for you to conduct the interview at your school site. The report of the study will be available in the form of dissertation.

Please contact me at [REDACTED], if you have any questions regarding the survey. You may also contact the Principal Investigator Kathy Geller, Ph.D., Drexel University (Sacramento Campus), School of Education (916) 213-2790.

Sincerely,

M. Lynn Martindale
Co-investigator
Doctoral Candidate
School of Education
Drexel University, Sacramento Graduate Center
Sacramento, California

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Title: Developing and Retaining Agricultural Education Teachers in California

Thank you for agreeing to participate in a study conducted by Lynn Martindale, a graduate student in the doctoral program in Educational Leadership and Management with Drexel University. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation requirement for my Doctoral Degree in Educational Leadership and Management under the supervision of Dr. Kathy Geller, Principal Investigator and dissertation Supervising Professor.

Through this research, Lynn hopes to identify experiences that lead people to choose Agricultural Education (Agricultural education) as a profession, experiences during the tenure as an Agricultural education teacher that has affects self-efficacy, and the experiences that may contribute to longevity in the profession.

You were selected as a possible participant in the study because of your years of experience. If you decide to participate in the one semi-structured interview, it will be conducted in person at your school site. I will ask a series of questions to promote discussion about your agricultural education experiences. The interview will take between 60-90 minutes for the purpose of data collection; I ask that you permit me to audio and videotape the interview. The interview is not meant to cause any inconvenience, risk or discomfort. The hope is that through the conversations about agricultural education new retention and professional development strategies may be identified.

Any information obtained in connection with this study that could identify you will be held confidentially. A pseudonym will be used for your name and school site. You may are under no obligation to participate and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

If you have any questions, please contact me at [REDACTED] [REDACTED], if you have any questions regarding the survey. You may also contact the Principal Investigator Kathy Geller, Ph.D., Drexel University (Sacramento Campus), School of Education kdg39@drexel.edu / (916) 213-2790.

Please sign this consent form acknowledging the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this form will be given to you for your records.

Signature

Date